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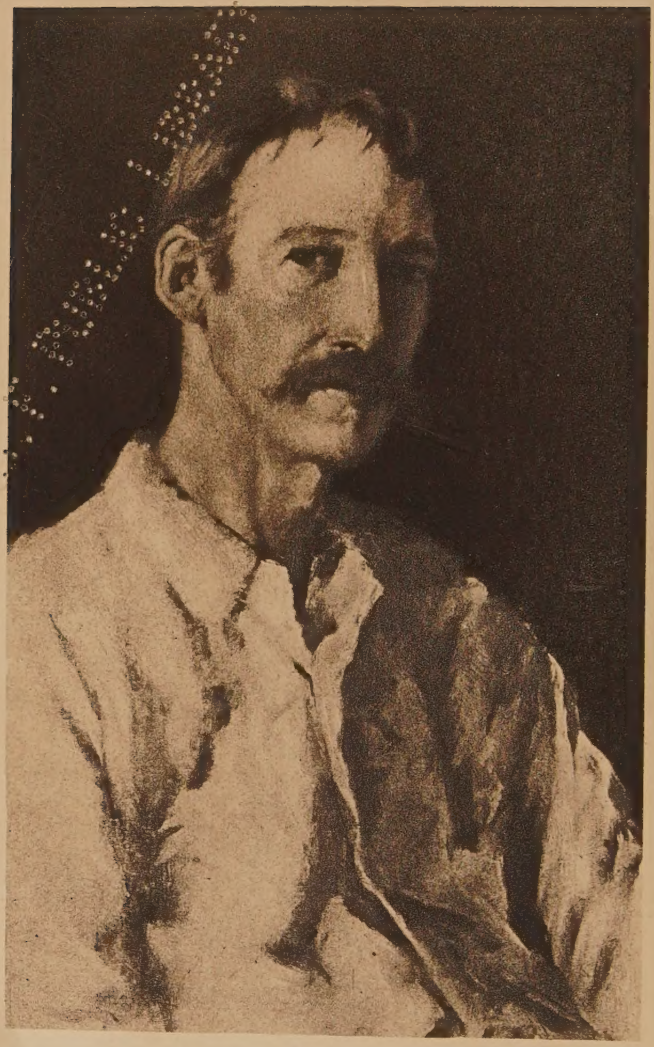

# ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

*A Critical Biography*

By

JOHN A. STEUART

VOLUME TWO

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# ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

# CHAPTER I

## A GLIMPSE OF WORKSHOP

THE stay at Davos was prolonged into April. Stevenson was striving valiantly to bear "the wolverine" on his shoulders, and even, as he told Doctor Japp, hoping to outlive it. Henley, who then and for several years before and after, acted as his unpaid literary agent, sent him £100, a most timely help to finances which were in a state of chronic exhaustion. Henley further introduced him to the publishing firm of Chatto and Windus, who took over his earlier books. For these services Stevenson was grateful, though remarking curiously that "gratitude is a tedious sentiment. It's not ductile, not dramatic." He hoped that Messrs. Chatto and Windus would publish both "Treasure Island" and "The Silverado Squatters", a hope that was only half realised.

The relations between the two men were then and for some time afterwards what they had been from the beginning, those not merely of intimate friends, but of boon comrades. They were "dear lad" and "dear boy" to each other, and their letters abound in candours and drolleries such as only sworn

comrades exchange. Henley had been seriously ruffled; but so far his affection for the old Louis, with whom he had lived for years "in absolute intimacy of give and take" had survived all shocks. Later the friendship was angrily broken; but the history of that unhappy event will be given in its place. Meanwhile Henley was rendering invaluable aid. In *London*, as has been noted, he published "The New Arabian Nights", to his own detriment and (as the proprietors averred) the death of the periodical. In 1882 he became editor of the *Magazine of Art*, one of Messrs. Cassell and Company's publications, and, undeterred by previous experience, promptly enrolled his friend as a contributor. Two things Stevenson particularly needed just then — money and publicity — and in the double capacity of agent and editor Henley helped him to both. In view of what is coming, these facts ought to be borne in mind.

During the later months of his residence at Davos, Stevenson devoted himself mainly to the composition of "Penny Whistles." The exercise involved a radical reconstruction or re-creation of his infancy and childhood, a ransacking of memory for a picture of the ailing, imprisoned child that Cummy lifted, swathed in a blanket, to gaze entranced from an upper window of Number 17 Heriot Row, and the boy who was alternately hunter and pirate and saw apparitions in the dusk under the trees at Colinton

Manse. Paradoxical as it may appear, no other work he wrote gave Stevenson at once so much pleasure and so much trouble. It was delightful to call back from the vanished past the elfish creature in whom he had always been so profoundly and so charmingly interested; but it was desperately difficult to imbue him with the old life, the old emotions and ecstasies, make him, in a word, act and feel and think as he had acted, felt, and thought so long ago. There are very few books in the language that might or could have been written by children. Strictly speaking, there is perhaps none. The genius of an Oxford mathematical don gave us an English classic of childhood, and Stevenson gave us another. But it may be said with tolerable certainty that neither could have been produced by a child.

Stevenson had one supreme advantage — a self-devotion that was itself an inspiration. Yet the work of recovering the past, with all its magic of experience and sensation, its illusions and aspirations, proved hard and baffling. So much had happened between 1860 and 1882 that the little Lou of legend had to be resuscitated by a species of artificial respiration which, if not painful, was provokingly slow. At any rate, the process of evocation proceeded with confused halts, mistakes, retracings, and drastic corrections. In the volume "His Workshop", already mentioned more than once, Professor

Trent prints a series of facsimiles which graphically illustrate the uncertain growth of the book and the many changes it underwent. Correct, erase, polish, prune, give back the verses to the anvil, is Horace's injunction to the poet; and, consciously or not, Stevenson was taking the lesson to heart. The verses which now seem so simple, so limpid, so apt and spontaneous, were in reality the result of prodigious labour. Those who hold with Carlyle that genius is merely an infinite capacity for taking pains might well adduce "A Child's Garden of Verses" as irrefragable proof. All the same, Stevenson, as I have said, enjoyed every moment of composition. He was his own hero; the feats which he found so exhilarating were his own feats; the quaint conceits and fancies which he tried to recatch as one might catch sunbeams and gossamer were his conceits and fancies. It was wholly delectable.

But how great was the trouble, how patient and persevering the artist, the manuscripts show. As Mr. H. H. Harper points out in the introduction to "His Workshop", it is "worthy of remark that the extant manuscripts of Stevenson's earliest poems show very few changes, such as elisions or alterations — possibly because he destroyed the first drafts — while those of many of his later poems are so changed and interlined, emended and transposed that it is extremely difficult to decipher them." The

handwriting becomes smaller and smaller; often it is so minute that in reading the use of a magnifying-glass is necessary. But the point is the extraordinary pains Stevenson bestowed on his work and the difficult process of evolution it underwent in reaching its final form. One or two examples will help the reader to appreciate both his extreme conscientiousness and his method of work. Thus the lines —

> Till I at last should catch a glance
> Of vessels sailing off to France.

become in transformation —

> To where the grown-up river slips
> Into the sea among the ships.

In yet a further transformation we get this stanza:

> To where the grown-up river slips
> Along between the anchored ships,
> And lastly between harbour walls
> Into the bright Atlantic falls.

"If these lines," observes Professor Trent, "do not bear strong testimony to Stevenson's mastery of cadence, the present editor's ear is greatly at fault." Of the cadence there can be no question; but it is the cadence of the mature artist rather than the artless lisping of a child.

Again, the lines —

> I saw the river dimple by
> Holding its face up to the sky.

are transmuted into the more sophisticated literary form —

> I saw the dimpling river pass
> And be the sky's blue looking glass.

which is pretty, but scarcely childish.

Once more. Perhaps the most familiar, most quoted lines in all "A Child's Garden of Verses" are —

> The world is so full of a number of things
> I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

a couplet which devotees claim embodies the whole philosophy of Stevenson. Possibly they are right; but the original version ran —

> The world is so great and I am so small
> I do not like it, at all, at all.

a sentiment less attractive philosophically; but, as students of child-nature will, I think, agree, many degrees closer to fact.[1]

These are but slight examples chosen at random to illustrate Stevenson's extreme care in all he wrote. His was not the fatal fluency which flows on like a shining river to spread at last into lagoons of vague writing. In verse, oddly enough, he had infinite difficulty with his poems in the Scots dialect of which

[1] "His Workshop" is a treasury of well-arranged facts; and it is a pity it is not available for the use of students of style. An author's manuscripts afford the best possible means for studying his methods of composition.

he was thought to have a perfect command. As the manuscript shows, one of the happiest of such pieces, "A Lowden Sabbath Morn", proved particularly recalcitrant. Like virtue, the delight of toil had, it seemed, to be its own reward; for of pecuniary profit there was small chance. On that point the wiseacres, who are always so exceedingly wise in their neighbour's affairs, were emphatic. Publishers, they pointed out, were not philanthropists (a fact, as might have been assumed, he had discovered for himself); and the public taste was for more piquant, "gingery" stuff than quaint rhymes relating babyish adventures in "the land of counterpane." He shrugged his shoulders, smiled, and went on, as an author so often must go on, in defiance of critical omniscience. At any rate, the contemned exercises yielded him entertainment in an existence which otherwise would be unendurable.

Davos had, indeed, one supreme advantage: Mrs. Grundy did not rule there. That "high alfresco kind of life" was undoubtedly dull; but as he sang with more gusto than poetry —

> There you can wear your oldest clo'.
> A fine set off to what you undergo.

And not only could you wear old clo'. You could smoke, lounge, talk at your ease, and indulge in wine parties to all Davos. "Three litres a day," Stevenson reported regretfully to his mother. Sicken-

ing and enough to make one a misanthrope, commented the moralist in him, yet all he could do was to "hate the donkey that has been duped" into such convivial extravagance.

### RENEWED WANDERINGS

These things were, however, but interludes, mere breaks in a ghastly routine of disease and death. Yet another reason for dissatisfaction was the fact, daily becoming more evident, that Mrs. Stevenson could not live at Davos. Both husband and wife were "sick" of the place and longed to get off. Called on to decide, Doctor Ruedi thought his patient had so far improved in health that he might venture to try a more congenial climate. In April, therefore, the family of three left Davos for good, glad to get away, and returned to England. Stevenson spent a few days at Weybridge and then went on to Burford Bridge, under Box Hill, where he passed some inspiring hours with Meredith. The intimacy with Meredith grew steadily, with increased appreciation on both sides. The older man, already famous, if not popular, was a generous but by no means indiscriminate admirer of the younger man's work; and the younger, as well he might, was elated by praise from such a quarter. There is a stage in a young writer's career when the appreciation of an honoured elder is more than bread and wine, more

than pats from reviewers and cheques from publishers. Stevenson was at that stage, and every word from Meredith was golden.

By May 20 the Stevensons were in Edinburgh; but almost immediately Louis went on with his father to Lochearnhead, in the Rob Roy region of Balquidder. There his Highland enthusiasms revived, and he made closer studies of the Appin murder and other matters, afterwards used so effectively in "Kidnapped." For part of June he was again at Number 17 Heriot Row, but so much an invalid that he went little out and saw only such old and intimate friends as Charles Baxter and Fleeming Jenkin. In the visit of the year before, as we have seen, he said farewell, a long farewell, to the haunts of his youth. One of his few and small outings during the present visit was to the house in Murrayfield, in the west end of Edinburgh, which was to be the scene of the murder described in "The Misadventures of John Nicholson."

In his enforced seclusion he was not idle. A young artist, Trevor Hadden, impressed by his essay on Whitman, wrote to him for counsel on some points both of art and conduct. Stevenson responded effusively. With a touch of worldly wisdom almost worthy of Chesterfield, he warned his correspondent against the folly of creating difficulties and the peril of shouldering responsibilities too readily. A young

man should not hasten to take up burdens which he might find himself too weak to carry. If his correspondent could keep sexual desires in order, it would make for peace and happiness. But he adds the suggestive caution, "Whatever you do, see that you don't sacrifice a woman. That's where imperfect love conducts us." Chastity, he observes, was a virtue to cultivate, but "hardship to a poor harlot is a sin lower than the ugliest unchastity." He distrusted the man "who has no open faults" — again a significant remark. On the side of art he urged his correspondent to "think last of what pays; first of what pleases"— a counsel which he did not always follow in practice. A year later he advised Mr. Haddon to keep clear of realism, and to bow his head over technique. "Think of technique when you rise and when you go to bed. Forget purposes in the meantime: get to love technique" — counsels which both in art and conduct bear the impress of personal experience.

For summer quarters Thomas Stevenson rented Stobo Manse, a quiet spot in Peebleshire, and thither the whole family went on holiday. But once again the weather did its worst for Stevenson. In sunshine the place is delightful; in the rains of July, 1882, he described it as "low, damp, and *mauchy*", the worst place, in fact, to which a sufferer from lung disease could go. He told Henley he was "not worth an

old damn", though, as usual, he did his utmost to work. As to health, a fortnight at Stobo undid all that Davos had done; and while he had strength for the journey he hastened off to London for re-examination by Sir Andrew Clark. Allowed to return to Scotland, he went north with Mr. Colvin, in advance of his family, once more and for the last time, to try the Highland air, the place selected being Kingussie. That delightful retreat was not then, what it has since become, a resort of idle fashion, with garish hotels, gaudy, flower-potted villas, boarding houses, golf links, all the disturbing appurtenances, in fact, of elaborately devised pleasure. At the time of Stevenson's visit it drowsed peacefully among its hills, sheltering a simple, primitive, hospitable people such as always appealed to him. For once, too, in his experience the weather was brilliantly fine.

When a Highland summer puts on its full glory, it exercises a species of enchantment that is almost intoxication. No other has quite its radiance and fragrance, its balm and healing breezes. For a week or two Stevenson breathed the air of Elysium. Among the scented, sun-flooded heather, beside the golden burn which he celebrates as a thing of bewitching joy and beauty, he wandered, loafed, dreamed, planned, inhaled the elixir of the hills. Yet health did not return, though his spirits rose at times to spasmodic bursts of hilarity. The poor worn body

seemed to have lost its old power of response, its old resilience, and the mind was fagged to utter exhaustion. Yet by the strange law of contraries, familiar enough to the creative writer, he produced there the first draft of one of his sprightliest, most entertaining stories, "The Treasure of Franchard." He arranged, too, a meeting with Cluny MacPherson, and was joyously anticipating a discussion on Highland history and tradition with the heir of a long line of chieftains and the repository of vast treasures of Celtic lore. But suddenly the weather broke and a serious hæmorrhage warned him to be off.

He went straight to London, once more to consult Sir Andrew Clark. Scotland was now forbidden on penalty of death; but since there were grave objections to Davos, the medical verdict was that some spot in southern France might be chosen. There followed a time of turmoil, trial, and anxiety. Ill and feeble as he was, Stevenson had to start at once in search of a new home among foreigners and strangers. His wife being also ill and unable to accompany him, he turned to his cousin Bob Stevenson for aid; and the two went first to Paris and then on to Montpellier, where Stevenson had a recurrence of hæmorrhage. Bob was obliged to return; and, recovered somewhat, Louis went on alone, drearily enough, one imagines, to Marseilles, where in the second week in October his wife was able to join him.

## BRIEF ANCHORAGE

Both were beggared in health, but needs must when the devil drives. Not that either of them was in the least disposed to fold the hands dismally and say, "Kismet." The word was not in their vocabulary. A home had to be secured; and, after a strenuous search of three days, they found a house that seemed in all respects to be what they sought. Campagne Defli, as it was rather grandiloquently called, was situated at Saint Marcel, five miles from Marseilles, in a sheltered nook among heights, part woods, part white cliffs, and presented the advantages of a country cottage within easy reach of a bustling seaport city. The rent was four pounds per month. Stevenson himself was charmed. Here, in his tossing, drifting course, was pleasant anchorage, and he looked forward to a long if not a permanent residence in the place. He was unspeakably weary of flitting to and fro, a fugitive ever fleeing for his life. It was clear he dared not face the inclemencies of his native land. Since, therefore, he must be an exile, here was a little Eden of refuge from storms and uncertainties. The "tragic folly" of his summers, he declared, was at an end. He was "sick of relapsing", sick, it may be assumed, of passing, a mere interesting "case", from doctor to doctor, each kindly and assiduous, but, alas! each mostly futile.

Above all things on earth he desired to get well, to escape from the sofa, the sick-room, and the medicine bottle. Here in a garden aglow with flowers, breathing the incense of hill and woodland, he would rest and recover himself. The thought was inspiring and exhilarating.

The Campagne Defli was in a state of dilapidation; but to the Bohemian instinct that was an added charm. With the practical energy which always distinguished her, Mrs. Stevenson undertook the work of renovation and decoration. She too was delighted, and delight made the tide of life run high again. Turning herself into a maid-of-all-work, she cleaned, scrubbed, papered walls, polished and covered furniture, shut off draughts, hung curtains, and laid an efficient hand on the tangled, neglected garden. It was the task of beautifying the Castilago shanty over again, only with a feeling of permanency and far greater possibilities of achievement. The fury of her activity and her ignorance of their language amazed and amused the charwomen and others who helped her. But she was emphatically of those who get things done, and Campagne Defli speedily took on a look of home and comfort.

To her keen disappointment and his, however, Stevenson did not regain his health; on the contrary, he grew steadily worse. He did not write; he could not read. Even the mild recreations of Patience and

wood-engraving had to be given up. It was feared he must resign himself to the inevitable and return to the bleak snowfields of Davos. Repeated hæmorrhages and two spells of insensibility in one day brought anxiety and terror. To complete the crisis, there came a discovery of another kind. The delightful Campagne Defli was found to be uninhabitable. The trouble began with fleas and ended with drains, sanitation not being one of the advanced sciences in France. To aggravate the situation, fever broke out in Saint Marcel; and once again Stevenson fled for his life — this time to Nice. A tragi-comic game of hide-and-seek followed. He was to telegraph to his wife by the way and on arrival. Four days she waited in vain for tidings; then, unable to bear the suspense any longer, she set out in search of him. Some of the kind people, who are always interested in the misfortunes of others, assured her she need not trouble, that beyond doubt her husband was dead and buried — dead of a sudden hæmorrhage and hurriedly buried, as a stranger and pauper, in an unknown grave somewhere by the wayside. The aid of the police was invoked, and ultimately the lost man was found at the Grand Hotel, Nice, "sitting up calmly reading in bed", and amused but scarcely displeased to find himself the object of a sensational hue and cry. The explanation was simple: telegrams and letters had miscarried.

Obliged to return, his wife left him at Nice, with explicit instructions not to venture back to Saint Marcel. On the homeward journey, as she described it in a racy letter to Symonds, "a dreadful old man with a fat wife" — an Englishman, as appears — getting into conversation with her and learning something of her mission, asked pleasantly where Stevenson wished to be buried? "He is done for," was the cheering judgment of this Job's comforter, and would be put underground with little ceremony by a callous population almost before the breath was well out of his body. He inquired compassionately what she meant to do, and suggested, if she could afford it, to have the unfortunate Stevenson embalmed. Such at times are the inscrutable ways of Samaritans.

Despite all cautions and orders, Stevenson returned to Saint Marcel, only to have the decision confirmed that Campagne Defli was impossible. He passed Christmas there, however, and did what he could to help his wife in preparation for yet another flitting. Early in January, 1883, he was again at Nice; but he and his wife were soon back at Marseilles, temporarily quartered at the Hôtel du Petit Louvre, on the trying business of finding a new home. By February, after some comic skirmishing, in which there were threats of legal proceedings on both sides, they were rid of the Saint Marcel failure, or, as Stevenson playfully announced, were "safely de-

livered of a Campagne." Of his skill and address in getting off without paying compensation to his landlady he was gleefully proud. Chance led the new search to Hyères, where for a week or two the couple put up at the Hôtel des Iles d'Or.

### A SECOND DEMI-PARADISE

The beginning of March found Stevenson back at Nice, whence he sent Henley a batch of verses for "A Child's Garden." Within a week he returned to Hyères. There, thanks to the energy and initiative of his wife, a new home was found, La Solitude, which had all the promise of another Eden. In those swift, erratic flights hither and thither his health actually improved, with a corresponding rise in spirits and in hope.

On March 20, La Solitude was taken over, both husband and wife being once more in high heart. Stevenson in particular was enchanted. To his mother he described the chalet soberly as "an excellent place, but very, very little." It consisted, in fact, of seven diminutive rooms — three, including the kitchen, on the ground floor and four above. To others he broke into lyrical ecstasy over the new acquisition. He now lived, he told Mr. Will H. Low, "in a most sweet corner of the universe" with a "sub-celestial" view of hill and plain and sea, plus most "aromatic airs." By day the garden, with its

roses, aloes, fig-marigolds, and olives was a demi-paradise. By moonlight it was pure enchantment. "Angels, I know, frequent it; and it thrills all night long with the flutes of silence," interrupted at intervals by the song of nightingales. A cynical reader, distrustful of beatific raptures and poetic rhapsodies, might inquire whether he lay awake all night listening to the flutes of silence or merely dreamed of their mystic vibrations. But the indubitable fact is he was charmed.

Moreover, there were external circumstances to cheer and inspirit. In the February number of the *Century Magazine* appeared a lavishly eulogistic review of "The New Arabian Nights." The book was published in August of the preceding year; in November it reached a second edition, and in January, 1883, he was able to inform Charles Baxter from Nice, in gleeful broad Scots, that "Stevison's last book's in the third edeetion" and was in process of translation "like the psalms o' David nae less, for the Frenchies and German folk in twa volumes." Nor was that all. "Familiar Studies" had been published in March, and on the whole had been well received. Some half-dozen stories and articles had also appeared during the previous twelve months in the *Cornhill*, comprising "Talk and Talkers" in two parts; "The Merry Men", likewise in two parts; and "The Foreigner at Home." In addition he con-

tributed "By-ways of Book Illustration" to the *Magazine of Art*, under the editorship of Henley. These things gave a fresh impetus and helped to keep his health steadily on the upward curve. With the appearance of the second part of "The Merry Men" in the *Cornhill* his connection with the magazine ceased. Leslie Stephen resigned the editorship and was succeeded by James Payn, the novelist, who chose his own contributors.

There is a delectable tradition, which has been most assiduously circulated, that, once admitted to the circle of his friends, no one was ever proof against the ineffable, all-conquering charm of Stevenson. It is a pity to destroy the pretty fable, but it does not accord with fact. That in certain conditions and upon certain people Stevenson exercised a remarkable charm is fairly attested in these pages. But it was not always equally potent. Sometimes it failed to captivate; sometimes it even repelled and antagonised; and one of those with whom it failed most signally was Leslie Stephen. To the young writer fighting for a position he rendered incalculable service; yet, strange as it may appear, while heartily aiding he also heartily disliked his contributor. That he suppressed his antipathy in the interest of letters and a desire to help a struggling author is a rare tribute to his fairness and generosity. That a man, active and generous as a patron, should feel anti-

pathetic towards his own protégé is a curious, but by no means an unfamiliar, paradox in psychology. It will easily be understood that the airy levities and sparkling audacities of Stevenson, his Gascon egoism and *outré* tastes would not fascinate the older man, who belonged to a totally different school, both by training and by temperament. At any rate, his judgment on Stevenson as he saw and knew him was a good deal on "this side of idolatry." Nor was he in the least blind to the defects and limitations of the writer he did so much to guide and make known. In his heart there was no real admiration for much bearing the initials "R. L. S." that he passed for press. Later, of Stevenson the novelist he wrote in terms of critical severity; but to that subject we shall return.

In prose Stevenson produced comparatively little at Hyères; but he enjoyed a burst of poetic activity, the most fruitful, probably, of his whole life. Many of the best pieces in "Underwoods" and "A Child's Garden of Verses" were written in La Solitude. An odd reason for his idleness in fiction is that his health was better than it had been for years and that he was lazy. It has been observed by Henry James and others, quite correctly, that he wrote best and most when he was ill in bed, because he was rarely too ill to write and was free from interruptions. The charm of La Solitude preoccupied him. Of the sweet

content, the domestic felicities of that time he sang cheerfully —

> My wife and I in one romantic cot
> The world forgetting, by the world forgot
> High as the gods upon Olympus dwell.
> Pleased with what things we have and pleased as well
> To wait in hope for those which we have not.[1]

The poem celebrates their happiness, their dreams, their ambitions. *She* plumped for a house and a garden; *he* staked his "votive powers" on a yacht and a well-filled cellar for the entertainment of his friends. The piece breathes a spirit of content and repose such as Stevenson rarely enjoyed, either before or after.

In May and June, 1883, "The Treasure of Franchard", drafted at Kingussie and finished at Davos, appeared in *Longman's Magazine*, for which Andrew Lang acted as "literary adviser." The same magazine, in its July and August numbers, printed in abbreviated form "Across the Plains", written four years earlier, and in May also Henley printed the sketch of San Francisco, "A Modern Cosmopolis", in the *Magazine of Art*. But Stevenson's chief work was "The Black Arrow", which ran serially in *Young Folks* from June to October and purported to be by Captain George North. Unlike "Treasure Island", it was a conspicuous success with boy readers, probably, as Mr. Charles E. Pearce remarks, because

[1] Poems published by the Bibliophile Society, Boston.

the author had in the meantime learned more of the craft of the serialist. Though thus successful, however, the tale was not published in book form until five years later, a fact which may be ascribed to the doubts or the lukewarmness of publishers.

In the same months the editor of the *Century Magazine* asked Stevenson for a story; and as an experiment "The Silverado Squatters" was sent, with little expectation that it would be accepted. The fear of rejection was happily not realised, and somewhat curtailed in form, the work appeared in the issues of that magazine for November and December — with doubtful appreciation by readers. Throughout the year, too, he laboured intermittently at "Prince Otto", a story which gave him immense trouble, and with greater success at "A Child's Garden of Verses", or "Penny Whistles", as it was still called.

### A LANDMARK

December was to prove a landmark in Stevenson's career; for early that month "Treasure Island" was published by Messrs. Cassell and Company. The transaction was carried through by Henley, who acted as "man of business" for his friend, "an admirable arrangement for me", Stevenson owned gratefully, "and one that rather more than doubled my income on the spot." The terms offered fairly dazzled

him. "A hundred pounds all alive, O!" was his jubilant mode of announcing his good fortune to Number 17 Heriot Row. "A hundred jingling, tingling, gold minted quid." It was wonderful; it was almost incredible. Yet in the very midst of his jubilation he was forced to observe pathetically, "It is dreadful to be a great big man and not be able to buy bread." Somehow the success appeared but to emphasise the many failures that went before.

With "Treasure Island" Stevenson got his first unmistakable taste of popularity. His essays, his short stories, his charming little sermons and pietistic musings, had pleased both the esoteric, self-elected arbiters of taste and the honest moralists who loved to find their favourite platitudes dressed up in pretty, persuasive phrases. Here was something wholly different, an appeal, in fact, made, as Stevenson indicates, in spite of "the wiseacres", to the vulgar crowd, the big, romping public that cares nothing for cliques and coteries, or thinks of them only to despise. The delightful philosopher, the beautiful moralist who had enchanted so many hearts, was deviating, descending, as it seemed, into the questionable paths of the mere story-teller. And the vulgar, romping crowd, with its crude tastes, received him with shoutings of joy. Not all his admirers were gratified.

Published in the usual way for the Christmas sea-

son as a book for juveniles, "Treasure Island", by one of the freaks of irony not infrequent in literature, found its most ardent admirers among experienced, sober-minded men of the world. The story of Gladstone's delight in the tale is familiar. That amazing being, who concentrated in himself the energies, the ardours, the enthusiasms of a score, was an assiduous reader of current fiction. By chance "Treasure Island" fell into his hands; he opened it, began to read, and, though harassed by party intrigues and state complications, fastened on it with youthful zest, sitting up "till two in the morning to finish it." I cannot discover that he sent the author one of his famous complimentary post-cards, of which I possess several. But James Payn, the new editor of the *Cornhill*, sent one of his almost indecipherable scrawls in warm congratulation; and Andrew Lang placed the book next to "Tom Sawyer" and the Odyssey for unmingled bliss. Henley too was helpful, as usual, and the Press in general behaved handsomely. The *Saturday Review*, which had hitherto rather pointedly ignored Stevenson, was not only polite but enthusiastic, declaring that the story was the best of its kind published in England since "Robinson Crusoe." Other influential papers singled it out as a tale of rousing interest. Even the *Athenæum*, then a literary oracle of power, was moved to something almost bordering on enthusiasm.

There were, of course, dissentients. The *Spectator* was not captivated, and a few others were either captious or "damned with faint praise." But their voices were scarcely heard in the general chorus of applause. Despite the ardour of the reception, however, sales were at first slow, only some five thousand copies being sold within a year of publication. Since then, and especially since Stevenson's death, the book has gone through edition after edition with a rapidity which must long ago have made it a most profitable commercial venture for the publishers. To-day it stands as the most popular of all its author's works, and one of the most popular books of its time. One effect was a demand for his earlier books, the copyrights of which were bought back by his father and the works themselves transferred to Messrs. Chatto and Windus.

Thus in regard to work and reputation the year 1883 passed. In the clear, soft, medicinal air of Hyères, Stevenson's health showed a steady improvement, and for most part his spirits were good. Writing years afterwards from Samoa, he declared that he had been happy just once in his life, and that was at Hyères; but in saying so he must have forgotten the "golden age" at Colinton Manse. Externally the current of existence flowed with unaccustomed smoothness. La Solitude, with its flowers, its nightingales, and its picturesque views, was like a paradise of dreams.

For part of July and August, Stevenson and his wife were at Royat, in Auvergne, where his parents joined them. The visit was wholly pleasant, save for one thing which Stevenson noted with concern — the too obvious failure of his father's health, physical and mental. The long, tense strain of worry and anxiety told heavily on Thomas Stevenson. In his honest, strenuous, rather arid way he was, or had been, an idealist. The lighthouses he built, the dogmas he held, the martinet rules he made for himself and for others, had all a moral aim; and morality to him was a thing of profound seriousness, even of gloom.

He never discerned, what his son divined instinctively, that in the game of life gaiety may be an effective buffer against the shocks of brutal fact, and that the light swim where the heavy sink. Trials with him were trials, not casual experiences to be dismissed with a laugh and forgotten. Louis had caused him unspeakable concern and vexation; and though the breach was now happily closed, the effect remained. His emotional violence, his proneness to brood, his fits of melancholy, and, it must be added, his agonies of distress and shame, had left their mark. In the heyday of his strength he was apt to be intolerant, arbitrary, despotic. In the reaction the granite character melted, and he softened to an almost childish gentleness and docility. Though he

had little enough cause for self-reproach, his behaviour suggested a touch of remorse, as if he felt that in certain crises he had been neither so wise nor so just as he might have been. Moreover, in a manner vague perhaps and ill-defined, yet intensely real, he was, as it were, forced to be proud of his son. What everybody said must be true. Louis must be clever, exceedingly clever, perhaps even great, and — who knew? — perhaps a not unworthy successor to the illustrious Sir Walter himself; and literature was not the poor, despised thing he, Thomas Stevenson, had thought it. He had been blind and unkind. And now, in spite of all ill predictions, Louis was making good, justifying his choice of a calling, and he, Louis's father, had done his utmost to thwart and hinder him. Yes, assuredly he had been both blind and unkind. In the feeling which such thoughts bred, follies, disobedience, defiance, were forgotten — or forgiven; and now, as if pathetically trying to make amends, he hung about his son, fearful lest any mishap should befall him, fearful even to let him out of his sight. The strong man had dwindled into a nervous, doting nurse.

On his part Louis was touched to pity and regret. In his philosophy there was no room for remorse, which was an idle waste of sentiment. But he was far too clear-sighted, far too well versed in human nature, not to perceive and understand the primary

causes of his father's sad decline. Something very like contrition possessed him. His father's well-being, his father's affection and opinions, tastes and prejudices, all became precious. In that subdued mood of tenderness he took leave of his parents and returned with his wife to Hyères.

That was in the beginning of September. Before the month was out news reached him of the death of his early friend, James Walter Ferrier, an event which plunged him into an abyss of emotionalism. The two had been chums in youth, co-editors of the *University Magazine*, co-members of the "Spec", and in other ways had enjoyed and shared a hundred intimacies. Stevenson mourned him as David mourned Jonathan. "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan," the wail rings through letter after letter written by Stevenson just then, and finds final expression in the sketch "Old Mortality", one of the most fervid and touching of his minor works.

That Ferrier possessed in an eminent degree the gift of inspiring affection is beyond doubt. He began life with heaped-up advantages — an environment of ease and culture, physical beauty, charm of manner and of character, talent, high hopes of intellectual distinction. Fortune seemed to have singled him out for all her choicest favours — and lo! he foundered miserably in mid-voyage, the victim of his own follies. Stevenson was strangely affected. The past

with all its poignant memories swept back upon him. Edinburgh — not the Edinburgh of reality, harsh, hostile, censorious, and repugnant, but Edinburgh transfigured by sentimental imagination — held him as by a spell. And in the midst, radiant, admired, beloved, was James Walter Ferrier. Stevenson could scarcely find words for his emotion. But his extreme sensibility is not wholly, nor perhaps mainly, to be set down to the ostensible cause of his grief.

The mechanism of the human mind is most delicately, most subtly complicated; and human sentiments and emotions are not always explicable by their surface manifestations. The truth is that Stevenson was undergoing a slow but momentous evolution, an almost insensible progress from one phase of thought and feeling to another entirely different and in some respects contradictory. And in the process he was making discoveries. In particular he was realising, with all the force of unequivocal fact, that levity and "schoolboy blasphemy" do not solve the everlasting problems of time and eternity, that, in truth, they are a species of boomerang which recoils disastrously on the thrower. His father's condition and its causes brought many reflections, some with a rankling sting. Ferrier's death, at a moment of peculiar sensitiveness, freed the springs of emotion and gave them a plausible excuse to flow.

True to himself, his motto continued to be what

it had been as expressed to Henley earlier in the year, "*Sursum corda;* heave ahead." The heaving ahead was slow and difficult. Finances were still embarrassingly "tight", and would have failed but for constant aid from his father. The power of work, too, was distressingly low. But "The Silverado Squatters" brought timely grist to the mill, and the hundred "golden-minted quid" were due for "Treasure Island." Moreover, "A Child's Garden of Verses" was struggling into proof, and one or two articles were written for Henley, notably the very decisive pronouncement on Realism. Just then the subject was much and deeply in his thoughts. For he was getting away from his French models, at any rate from the French naturalists. The once-admired masters were not, after all, the acme of excellence and wisdom he had once thought them; indeed, he made the discovery that their theories, as illustrated in practice, were death to real art. Flaubert was good, Daudet was good, but infinitely better was the "glorious old pagan" of "The Three Musketeers", and best of all was the careless, galloping, affluent romantic who gave the world "Rob Roy."

### SHEDDING OLD INFLUENCES

Of the great Russian realists he knew little, although then and for years afterwards W. D. Howells, the American high priest of naturalism,

persistently held them up as models of supreme excellence, with a corresponding contempt for the little romantics of Britain and their childish love of fairy stories. Stevenson read Dostoevski's lurid piece of realism, "Crime and Punishment", and was moved to a wild enthusiasm of admiration. "Dostoevski is a devil of a swell, to be sure," was his verdict. But that was a passing phase and did nothing to reconcile him to the French naturalists. To their graces of style, their mastery of technique, he then and always paid glowing tribute; but he thought them lacking in gaiety, the gaiety with which the genius of Renan invested even the unpromising, abstract subject of theology. Moreover, he must have felt they were somewhat deficient in imagination, and because they were deficient he attributed their deficiency to sheer perversity of method. A trip to Russia would have enlightened him. Tourgenief and Tolstoi would have shown him how true realism and true imagination coexist and unite in producing great works of art. And Tchekhov, though ten years his junior, would have set his feet in the path of freedom for the artist — that freedom, in fact, for which he was rather blindly groping. He had still to learn, what seems an elementary fact in creative art, that the great novelist, like the great dramatist, is essentially impersonal, and must not, on penalty of disaster, obstruct or embarrass himself with theories.

That way lies failure. For the moment he begins to indulge himself with critical theories or so-called canons of art he impedes the free exercise of creative energy, because, consciously or unconsciously, he becomes the slave of his own arbitrary rules. One cannot imagine Shakespeare theorising on how to write a play or Scott on how to tell a story. Each was guided by an instinct, an impulse deeper, more potent, than any theory of criticism. In reality the critic must go to the creative writer for his little set of rules. Aristotle, the father of criticism, did no more than deduce and systemise the principles and practice of the Greek poets who happened to precede him. The creator must always and inevitably be the true teacher of the critic. Rules, arbitrarily made in ignorance or defiance of its own mysterious workings, are the last things that imagination obeys, and the forced obedience is given, not by a willing servant, but by a rebel.

In his articles of faith Stevenson's "Note on Realism" deserves particular attention, because in some eclectic quarters it has been received as a sort of divinely inspired gospel, or at least a triumphant vindication of his own performances. As a statement of personal taste and belief it is interesting; as an exposition of the vital principle of creative or imaginative literature it not only reveals sharp limitations, but a fundamental misconception of the

scope and function of the novel. Not till the end of his career was Stevenson able to attain the untrammelled freedom from theory and prepossession which great imaginations enjoy from birth. "Weir of Hermiston", notable for many things, is notable in particular for this, that it marks the real point of artistic emancipation for its author, the point, that is to say, at which, happily forgetting his own critical dogmas, he blended realism and romance in what, broken as it is, remains his masterpiece.

While occupied with these theories of his art at Hyères, he planned and partly wrote a story called "The Travelling Companion", which a discerning publisher is reported to have described as "a work of genius, but indecent"; and two years later at Bournemouth was discovered by its author to be "a gross, bitter, ugly daub", and as such went the way of other abortive attempts.

In November came a sharp little brush with Henley, one of several brushes which ultimately produced open rupture. Henley, eruptive and volcanic, was apt to express himself strongly in moments of irritation, and with his "dear lad" was always frank. Stevenson, keeping his temper on that occasion, pleaded for patience, for charity, for peace. "Let us," he wrote, "a little imitate the Divine patience and the Divine sense of humour, and smilingly tolerate those faults and virtues that have so

brief a period and so intertwined a being." For a moment the tiff caused an electric tingle of the atmosphere; but it passed, leaving an unclouded sky.

The closing year left Stevenson with a grateful feeling of success. On the 1st of January he reported himself to Number 17 Heriot Row as debt-free, with an actual balance of fifty pounds in hand. Moreover, some two hundred and fifty pounds were due and would be paid in the course of a few weeks. For twelve months his earnings, as he reckoned, amounted to £465 0*s.* 6*d.*, a niceness of calculation that reminds one of Mr. Mantalini. "Should I not be grateful?" he exclaimed joyfully. "Come, let us sing unto the Lord."

## HEROISM IN CALAMITY

With the new year Henley and Charles Baxter were at La Solitude. It was the jolly trio of old Edinburgh days over again. "Willie brewed a peck o' maut, and Rab and Allen cam' to pree." The three blithe lads of Burns's little masterpiece of conviviality were scarcely blither than the festive three who met at Hyères. The tiny La Solitude being too small for their proper entertainment, Stevenson went off with his wife and guests to Nice, an adventure which all but cost him his life. Taking foolhardy risks, carried away, perhaps, by the spirit of jollity, he caught cold. The complaint seemed

slight, and his friends, having to return home, left him. They had scarcely gone when he was in the grip of pneumonia, complicated by congestion of the kidneys. At once it became clear that his life was in imminent peril. A local doctor, indeed, took Mrs. Stevenson aside and told her that her husband was dying and could not even be kept alive till some of his own people from Edinburgh might reach his bedside. Reporting her anguish to her mother-in-law, she wrote: "I watched every breath he drew all night, in what sickening apprehension you may guess." Fortunately another doctor, a Scot named Drummond, was called in, and gave the cheering assurance that Louis might not only recover, but with care might live to be seventy, only he "must stop the running about." Alas! the running about had not properly begun; and the Psalmist's three-score-and-ten proved an impossible ideal. But the good Drummond's optimism was the best of medicines. Bob Stevenson too came, vital, inspiring, and practically helpful. When the crisis was past, Stevenson told his mother it was "chuck-farthing" for his life.

Once more he made an amazing recovery, and at the end of a month was able to return to La Solitude, though as a mere breathing spectre. And as troubles never come singly, yet other calamities awaited him. He was attacked by a species of ophthalmia, medi-

cally attributed to contagion from street dust, by rheumatism, and by sciatica. The lung condition, too, was such that, as a precautionary measure, his right arm was put into a sling, sometimes even fastened to his side; and, harder penalty still, he was forbidden to speak. In this condition he was almost helpless. He could not amuse himself with Patience or chess; he durst not talk, and reading was impossible. So, unhappily, was sleep, except under the influence of opiates. Altogether it was a time of acute misery; and there was the ugly conviction, at any rate on Mrs. Stevenson's part, that the combination of calamities was primarily due to that too festive visit to Nice.

Adversity, it has been said, is the true test of manhood. In that dire crisis there shines out radiantly the invincible Stevenson, the brave man fighting gallantly and cheerfully with his back to the wall. The British race has never been lacking in valour. In ten thousand glorious adventures by sea and land, in ten thousand emergencies and forlorn hopes, it has shown an undaunted heart. But in all its shining records there are few more admirable, more inspiring examples of real heroism than the bearing of that intrepid spirit in the darkness and distress at Hyères. To all generous breasts the thought of his fortitude, his happy valiance, will bring a thrill of admiration, mingled with sympathy

and affection. In that maelstrom of misfortune most strong men would have gone down; he smiled and survived.

As he regained some measure of strength, and was allowed to talk in whispers, he joined his wife in the childish game of improvising stories, which she wrote down and were afterwards used as the basis of "The Dynamiter." And while she attended to household duties and he lay alone in his darkened room, he wrote verses for "A Child's Garden" in a large scrawl with his left hand, the use of his right being still denied him. When readers are charmed by the quaint grace and cheered by the sunny philosophy of that little book, they might well pause a moment to consider the circumstances in which some of its most attractive, most characteristic pieces were composed. To that time of trial, too, belongs the final version of the best-known of all his poems, the much-quoted, much-sung "Requiem", first drafted in the dark days in California. It suggests grave thoughts, but they are still brave thoughts.

But because he was brave in face of death, it is nonsense to suppose, as has been supposed and asserted, that Stevenson did not feel "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." To picture him as perpetually encased in an armour of gay indifference, impervious to the blows of Fate and human

feeling, is to make him out either a fiend or a demi-god; and he was neither. He loved the warmth and colour of life, but he knew dejection and shrank from the cold breath of the ancient enemy. In a letter to Henley written then he refers suggestively to "the creak of Charon's rowlocks, and the miasmas of the Styx." But by an effort of will, and largely for the sake of others, he made a jest of despondency. He had to comfort and sustain his wife in her racking anxiety; he had to conceal his real condition from his father, who must be protected from shocks; above all, he had to be true to himself. Whatever happened, whatever ills Fate might bring, he would not sink into the querulous, whimpering invalid, full of abject, impotent complainings. And there was yet another reason for maintaining a semblance of blitheness. Miss Ferrier, Walter's sister, was on a prolonged visit to La Solitude. To cheer her in her grief he must preserve something of the spirit of the old Edinburgh days; and despite physical prostration he did.

When able to read a little he took up the "Confessions of St. Augustine", and, as might be expected, was enchanted by one of the most human books ever written; especially was he impressed by the saint's descriptions of the delirious headlong passions of youth and the tragedies they so often involve. Lust alone, he commented significantly, "is but a

pigmy" which never attacks single-handed, but must, so to speak, have confederates. By way of contrast he included "Petronius Arbiter", which he found less immoral than some much-esteemed modern works, but "singularly silly." The fortune of a jest, we know, lies in the ear of him who hears. It was not Stevenson's good fortune to read "Quo Vadis" and learn from it what a writer of genius could make of the author of "The Feast of Trimalchio"; but if he read that little masterpiece of Roman comedy except with sheer delight, one can only surmise that his faculties, and especially his sense of humour, were asleep. Tacitus also he tried, but found the most condensed and pungent of Roman historians too stiff for his invalid mind, even with the aid of a French crib. For variety's sake he threw in "the incredible Barbey d'Aureville", whom, with all his "rot", his crowding absurdities of sense and sentiment, he preferred to "the whole Modern School of France." The Modern School of France, as we have seen, was fast losing its power of attraction. Had he at last discovered that technique alone does not suffice for great literature, and that the immortals are usually distinguished by a free and careless affluence, rather than by any finicky devotion to the mechanics of style? At any rate, the French influences were very decidedly on the wane.

With such mild recreations he returned slowly to

the habits of normal life. Winter passed into spring; spring was advancing to summer, and, despite frequent slippings backward, he was making real progress. May came, with its flowers and its perfumes, to tempt him out-of-doors; the nightingales sang, the mystic "flutes of silence" vibrated in his soul. He looked from the prison of La Solitude, counting the hours till he should be free. And then suddenly, when hope was once more running high, fresh and shattering disaster came, disaster which this time seemed fatal. In the still midnight, when all was composed, and without a moment's warning, it fell — first a sharp convulsive cough, then instantly a choking deluge of blood. His wife, hearing a noise, rushed in terror-stricken from another room. He could not speak; but to comfort her, as she afterwards related, he signed for a pencil and paper and wrote, "Don't be frightened. If this is death it is quite easy." Then, to prove his composure, he took the medicine bottle from her hand, measured himself a dose and swallowed it. According to her account, he showed no fear and was not at all flustered. If this was the end, well! it was the end, that was all. Like his own Will o' the Mill he had looked into the face of Death and found him not unfriendly. It was in fact, "Hail, old friend; if it must be, I am ready." The bleeding was stopped, but to experienced eyes it did not seem that the patient could recover.

Learning of his condition, a local clergyman hastened to La Solitude to pray with the dying man. He was not admitted. But later, when Stevenson was told of the visit, he remarked whimsically, "Tell him to come when I am better, and I will pray for a clergyman in danger of living."

Alarmed by the news of this latest and worst of all his attacks, Henley and Baxter immediately sent a doctor from London, and his mission was so far successful that once again Stevenson was snatched back literally from the brink of the grave. At best, it was indicated, the treatment could only be one of "patching up." In his own phrase, "the tabernacle was in rags", and the problem was how to prolong its tottering existence. And the conditions of reprieve were especially trying to a restless spirit — no walking, little talking, spare eating and drinking, no excitement, even of a pleasurable kind, nothing but a somnolent, vegetable existence. Yet he accepted his doom with quite unusual docility. If condemned to live the life of "an invalid girl", to abstain from all the activities and pleasures of a man, well, it was better to be alive than dead. And there was always the gambler's chance that in its inscrutable spinning the wheel of fortune might bring up trumps. In that mood of subdued hope or hidden despair he resigned himself to the dreary experience of being nursed.

But misfortune was not yet done with him. In ancient Greece they would have said he was expiating some atrocious crime, personal or ancestral, and that the Erinnys were determined he should not escape till their vengeance was glutted. While he was patiently struggling back to health, or such measure of health as seemed possible, calamity came in a new form. Cholera broke out among the rose farms at Toulon, a few miles away, and quickly spread to Hyères. It seemed the last stroke of a malicious fate. Little wonder that, with all his courage, his nerve, his buoyancy, Stevenson momentarily lost heart. What was the use of prolonging a losing fight? To do so were only to invite fresh disaster. Better lie quietly at rest under the cheerful epitaph so lately composed.

There was still the resource of flight; but he had not energy enough to flee from an enemy that was in the very air he breathed. Yes! better give up and be done with relapses. Then, as at a bugle call, there flashed from the gloom the old spirit of defiance. One more fight, one stout sally of the beleaguered body. It was worth trying. With immense effort and many precautions, assisted by his wife, Miss Ferrier, and a valet "got cheap — second-hand", he managed to get away to Royat. There for a month or so he rested at the Hôtel Chabassière, while trying to decide how to repiece his broken life.

The weather, as he reported to his mother, was demoniac, and he spent most of his time in bed. Yet even then he sent off more verses for "A Child's Garden", though he confessed to Mr. Colvin he was "very dim, dumb, dowie, and damnable." He hated to be silenced; but declared characteristically he was not unhappy, only blurred into "a heavy, dull, somnolent superannuated son of a bedpost."

The question "What next?" was urgent. Again he had thoughts of Davos; but the prospect of isolation, disease, and eternal snowfields was too dreary. Besides, his wife could not live there, and he wished to hear from the medical oracles in London what his chances really were. The truth is that, with all his brightness and buoyancy, he was homesick, yearning to get back to her who had so often and so effectually comforted him, "Like one whom his mother comforteth." The craving for that dear sympathy and tenderness, which the troubles and perplexities of life bring to the strong man no less than to the weak, was upon Stevenson. Accordingly he wrote to Number 17 Heriot Row that, as a desperate venture or forlorn hope, he was returning to England.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RETURN TO BRITAIN

On the 1st of July, 1884 Stevenson once more set foot in Britain. His first business was to consult the eminent physician, Sir Andrew Clark. There was, in fact, a general consultation of specialists, who agreed, somewhat doubtfully, that with extreme care he might be able to pass a summer in the British Isles. Scotland was considered too rigorous, but some warm, sheltered spot in the south or west of England might be tried, more or less experimentally. Had Stevenson followed his own inclinations then, he would unquestionably have gone off in search of the tropic climes which alone seemed to offer some prospect of regained health, and had, moreover, been his romantic dream since boyhood. He was sick, body and soul, of relapses, of weather that was nearly always bad and consequently was poison to him. But various reasons, personal and financial, affected his decision. One especial reason was his wish to be near his father, who, all too manifestly, had not long to live. As we have seen, Thomas Stevenson knew nothing of the serious condition of

his son, and, it was felt, could not bear the shock of Louis's exile. Chiefly for his father's sake, therefore, Stevenson decided to remain, if that were at all possible, somewhere in Britain within tolerably easy reach of Edinburgh.

With his wife he spent ten days in a private hotel or boarding house at Richmond; but that lovely suburb of London was found unsuitable and the two went on to Bournemouth, where Mrs. Stevenson's son was at school. Bournemouth, like Davos, is much a resort for invalids, though for different climatic reasons. It has no snowfields to freeze out the germs of disease; but it has an environment of pine woods and stretches of upland heath, with scores of wind-screened nooks and sunny crannies falling downward to the sea front. The Stevensons decided to remain. For three months they occupied rooms in a boarding house named Wensleydale, on the West Cliff; then in the first week in November they moved into a furnished house in Branksome Park, a western suburb of luxuriant foliage and general sylvan beauty. The house was called Bonalie Towers, a name which Stevenson found pleasantly reminiscent of Bonaly Tower, Colinton, once the home of a local celebrity, Lord Cockburn, the biographer of Francis Jeffrey. There they remained, as it were, on probation until April, 1885. Throughout the winter Stevenson's health, though wretchedly

bad, was on the whole better than it had been on the Continent. After all, the British climate was proving tolerable, and Bournemouth seemed to give a promise of permanency. Rejoiced by the tidings, Thomas Stevenson immediately bought a house there which he presented as a gift to his daughter-in-law, with five hundred pounds added for furnishing. Nothing was now too good for Louis, and the gift of a house and furniture was but one of the many proofs of his father's desire to help and to please.

SKERRYVORE

His liberality flowed unceasingly. Not only did he buy and furnish a house for his son and his son's wife and family, he continued to pay the major share of the household expenses. On his part Louis softened to a half-penitent tenderness. Sometimes in writing he bantered his father good-humouredly; but behind the banter was a new sentiment of affection and concern. Hitherto it had been the duty of parents to children that mattered; now it was beginning to be the duty of children to parents. Doubtless he had his own thoughts regarding the past, thoughts of folly, selfishness, defiance, heart-break, and here were heaped-up kindnesses that were as coals of fire on his head. He might regret, but, alas! regret is so futile an atonement for evil done. He could, however, be grateful, and his gratitude to

the failing, childish man he had tried so sorely deepened to a sort of penitent affection.

In honour of family achievements the new home was gleefully renamed Skerryvore, as related in the little poem of dedication printed in *Underwoods*.

> I, on the lintel of this cot, inscribe
> The name of a strong tower.

The name, therefore, has attained a double interest, a double celebrity, first in engineering science, and next, and more fondly, in literary history. The strong tower stands as it stood, "a star for seamen"; the house too stands, though not so strongly; but he, the transient guest who gave it fame, "abode his destined hour and went his way", his long, devious, toilsome way to the lonely mountain top in far Samoa. Three years the tenancy lasted — three years of invalidism, seclusion, and withal amazing literary activity. "Get an incurable disease," said Oliver Wendell Holmes in giving a receipt for longevity — "get an incurable disease, nurse it carefully, and you will see your strong, healthy contemporaries dropping off one by one while you go on living." One might almost imagine that the shrewd and delightful autocrat wrote with a prevision of the ailing Stevenson.

Skerryvore stands picturesquely on the edge of Alum Chine, or ravine, facing south, with a tiny lawn in front leading to a sharp declivity of tangled

shrubbery, and the main road behind — a common two-story, yellow-brick cottage overgrown in part by patchy ivy. It is little altered since Stevenson's day, save for certain additions, including a billiard room at the back. But the view he loved is obstructed or restricted by villas of a more pretentious type, the work of the ubiquitous speculative builder. To Stevenson it brought a new and delicious sensation of ownership. Here at last he seemed to be anchored, and the anchorage was his own, or his wife's, thanks to the overweening generosity of the most indulgent of fathers.

With a zest which was in itself a tonic, the couple set themselves to the inspiriting task of making a new home, this time, if it pleased Heaven, a permanent one. Sheraton furniture, blue china, pictures, busts, draperies, upholsteries, books, and other belongings from La Solitude; a rare Venetian mirror, the gift of Henry James; specimens of the work of Rudin, the famous French sculptor; special photographs of friends: Henley, Fleeming Jenkin, Mr. Colvin, and others — all the comforts and modest elegancies, in which good taste and limited means combined to prevent a vulgar profusion, marked and embellished the new possession. On a hint, perhaps, from "The Vicar of Wakefield", there was a "blue room", the dining room, with possible hope of a green, for the present drawing-room and library

in one. Mrs. Stevenson was an adept in home-making; and here for the first time, at any rate since she married Louis, her talent found full scope. Both in and out of doors she took command. The internal arrangements were naturally hers; but her energy, her initiative, extended to the garden stretching down to a small stream in the bottom of the Chine. The labyrinths and terraced walks which she designed are still in part there, as testimony of her skill. The little Eden so long desired, so variously sought, seemed at last secure and perfect. For a time Stevenson's buoyancy returned. In the summer sunshine he walked about in the shade of a red umbrella, admiring his wife's handiwork as he inhaled the perfume of her flowers. Yes! the little Eden seemed complete.

One fond hope, however, was not to be realised. As time passed his health did not improve; on the contrary, it went dismally from bad to worse. The little excursions with the red umbrella became rarer and rarer, became, in fact, snatched interludes in the weary routine of the sick-room. It was then that, as he afterwards said, he was a "pallid brute that lived like a weevil in a biscuit." The long course of invalidism, and still more the terror of a relapse, made him timorous. He kept indoors when, according to medical opinion, he might with advantage have been out enjoying the sunshine and the breeze. The burned child dreads the fire. He was taking no risks.

Another attack such as he had had at Hyères would end everything. And if he were to die, what should become of those dependent upon him? The question was one which gave him much concern, and sufficiently explains his timidity.

Much, indeed most, of his working-time was spent in bed, often, it is clear, rather from choice than necessity. Writing in bed had become a habit. Moreover, it has to be borne in mind that, while his ill-health meant periods of prostration and lassitude, it involved little or no pain. According to his own statement he never suffered as much pain as comes from an ordinary toothache — a record which multitudes of strong men might envy. And from its nature his disease left all his faculties clear, acted, indeed, as a mental stimulus, a sort of exacerbation of the brain which was at once a source of strength and a cause of weakness. We have thus the seeming paradox of a writer who is helped, even spurred to activity, by physical infirmity.

In that respect Stevenson bears a close resemblance to John Sterling, of whom Carlyle has given so vivid and so beautiful a picture. Both Sterling and Stevenson were consumptive; both were temperamentally eager, nervous, audacious, irrepressibly restless. The lack of the due inertia was one of the defects noted in Sterling by Carlyle; the lack of the due inertia was a fundamental defect in Stevenson.

Finally, the mental activities of both were morbidly increased by the very disease which made them invalids and exiles. However it might be with Stevenson the man, Stevenson the writer was certainly most himself when propped in bed amid a litter of pillows, papers, books, and cigarette ash — the latter a cause of dire offence to all his landladies. In bed he enjoyed what Wordsworth calls meditative peace. Imagination could brood undisturbed, and to be productive the imagination must have periods of repose, of "meditative peace." As to Stevenson's incessant industry, we revert to Henley's judgment, that he wrote with such deadly assiduity because he could not help it, because writing was the very breath of life to him.

There are compensations in all things. If in those Bournemouth years Stevenson had little heart or strength for play or pleasure, literature is the richer in consequence. But one question inevitably arises, alike for the dispassionate critic and the professed Stevensonian — was the quality of his work affected by the conditions in which it was produced? In part the difficult answer has already been given, and will appear more fully in what is to follow. Here, however, it may be remarked that literary history is not without illuminating, inspiring instances of bodily infirmity nobly overcome. Milton was blind; Pope's rickety body had to be bound up in corsets; Keats

was consumptive; Heine lay for years paralysed and half blind on his "mattress grave" in Paris; yet under such disadvantages they produced some of their most splendid, most brilliant writings. The case of Stevenson is therefore by no means unique, though it does not at all detract from his valour that in similar or greater hardships others were brave. Rather is it a tribute to the hardihood of the literary temperament, the power and persistency of will which underlie all continuous mental labour, and in particular all great efforts of imagination.

### DRAMATIC VENTURES

The Bournemouth period opened with a determined bout of play-writing. Henley and his wife took lodgings near Wensleydale, and the two friends collaborated with burning enthusiasm and astonishing speed. "Beau Austin" was thus written in four days, and "Admiral Guinea" was dashed off with almost equal rapidity. From the first Henley had soaring ambitions as a dramatist. Conscious of his own high gifts, irked by the drudgery and small rewards of journalism, he saw in the drama a primrose path to affluence and ease. Vital, vivid, masterful, magnetic, he fired Stevenson with his own ardour, his own glorious dreams of wealth. "The theatre is a gold-mine," Louis told his father eagerly; and resolved to do his best to secure a share of its abound-

ing riches. By the end of September both plays were practically complete; and the sanguine, self-enchanted authors took no pains to conceal their delirious joys of anticipation. A London success and their fortunes were made. And why not a London success? Here was the stuff to set the West End on fire. But, despite strenuous efforts and the warm encouragement of Beerbohm Tree, the success remained a dream.

Already in July "Deacon Brodie" had been produced at the Old Prince's, later the Prince of Wales's Theatre with Henley's brother in the title rôle. It made its appeal, and disappeared. Anticipating somewhat, it may be stated that several years later, on November 3, 1890, "Beau Austin" was put on at the Haymarket, with all the éclat of a notable West End event. The programme lies before me as I write. The cast included Beerbohm Tree as "George Frederick Austin", Fred Terry as "John Fenwick", and Miss Horlock as "Dorothy Musgrave." A prologue by Henley, promising "a faint and fine perfume of old-world courtliness and old-world bloom", was spoken by Tree; and we may suppose spoken inimitably. In the good old Georgian days —

> Men and women were human to the core.
> The hearts that throbbed beneath that quaint attire
> Burned with a plenitude of essential fire.
> They too could risk, they also could rebel,
> They could love wisely — they could love too well.

The play had all the advantages of superb staging and first-rate acting. Moreover, some of the critics were highly complimentary. The London correspondent of an important American weekly, the *Nation*, hailed the production as "the most important event of the London Winter Season." The critic continued: "It is a refreshing novelty to see a modern English play in which manner is as carefully considered as matter, and artistic effect is preferred to melodramatic morality," the morality, perhaps, of "Lay Morals." The dialogue is described as "racy, witty, polished"; the play is "well constructed, and the characters live and are not mere puppets." The majority of English critics, however, were less enthusiastic, though the beauty of the style was everywhere acknowledged. Seven years later, when Stevenson was gone, "Admiral Guinea" was produced experimentally at the New Century, a theatre established for the production of works by young, promising, or unknown dramatists. Again the *Nation* was cordial in its praise and London critics gave a qualified approval; but the acting appears to have been poor and the performance made no impression. Ten years earlier, it may be noted, "Deacon Brodie" was produced at Wallack's Theatre, New York, when American critics, with mistaken ingenuity, traced its origin to "Jim the Penman" and "The House on the Marsh", a novel by Miss Florence

Warden. A writer in the New York *Critic*, using the initials "H. B.", understood to be Henley himself, repudiated the charge and had no difficulty in proving there had been no plagiarism. In regard to all the Stevenson-Henley plays the British public evinced a Philistine indifference, with the result that the potential gold mine yielded no precious ore.

In the spring of 1885 the collaborators made one effort more with "Macaire", also unsuccessful. Then it was exit Stevenson the dramatist. The golden dreams had vanished, leaving only a smarting sense of failure. The causes of that failure are not far to seek: Stevenson had little dramatic imagination, and Henley had still less. Moreover, Stevenson was almost entirely ignorant of stage technique. He had not mastered the "trade" of writing plays, as he had mastered the trade of writing essays and stories, and he was not disposed to learn the craft, even were there opportunities, which there were not. Dramatic critics have pointed out, quite justly, that the Stevenson-Henley plays are too consciously literary for the stage. "The Celestial Manna of literature" fails, in theatrical phrase, to carry across the footlights. Working from a literary tradition of which they could not rid themselves, the authors were too much bent on giving artistic finish where artistic finish is neither desired nor appreciated. Literature and the theatre were not then, any more

than they are now, convertible or interchangeable terms. A more serious fault, since it was radical and fundamental, was that neither of the collaborators could sink or merge his own identity in that of the characters. Personality, individuality, so precious in the essay or the sermon, are dangerous, one may say deadly, ingredients in creative work.

### THE RIFT IN THE LUTE

Stevenson took failure with characteristic nonchalance; but Henley was bitterly disappointed. He was also hurt, for pride as well as ambition got a fall. He had come ramping, his whole immense, exuberant, boisterous personality aflame over the scheme that was to lift both partners to a glorious independence, and in particular free himself from the prostituting bondage of journalism. His loud talk, his resounding Rabelaisian laugh, filled the house. He dominated it by sheer force of vitality, others being for the moment but mere puppets and satellites. Stevenson fell in with his plans; but Mrs. Stevenson, who liked to be mistress in her own house, and had never been among his worshippers, resented his dominance and his noise. Still more she resented his too obvious power over Louis, whom she saw reduced to the position of an infatuated assistant in schemes which her shrewd clear sense of the practical secretly rejected. For in her heart she never

believed in those splendid castles in the air, things, as she divined, of mere wind and vapour. There were also other feelings at work. Very early she had put her black mark against Henley's name. Though she tolerated him, she did not like him. Now the rift which was to widen so disastrously had definitely begun.

But, intoxicated by his own dreams of splendour, Henley saw nothing, or at any rate paid no heed to equivocal looks and remarks. Tugging excitedly at his tangled red beard, he swore with rousing ardour that at last fortune was fairly conquered and won. He worked with gloating, fiery energy, spurring Louis to an almost equal zeal. And when the thing was done, lo! something which no alchemy of theirs could transmute into coin of the realm. The primrose path had proved a delusion and a snare. To Henley's proud spirit the blow was humiliating; to his desperate sense of need it was tragic; and it may be supposed he did not practise politeness. But he did not yield easily. "Admiral Guinea" and "Macaire" were put into type and hawked among theatrical managers, with a persistency which drew a protest from Stevenson, no doubt after domestic consultations. On second thoughts, he now announced, he was much dissatisfied with the work done in collaboration. Rereading "Admiral Guinea" in cold blood, he found it "a low, dirty, blackguard, ragged piece, vomitable in many parts, simply vomit-

able", though he defended it gallantly against similar strictures by his father. In that judgment we may detect suggestions from behind. The hand was the hand of Louis, but the voice was the voice of Fanny. Henley, with his self-assertiveness, his noisy laughter and domineering ways, was a failure and, worse, a nuisance. Why not drop him?

Stevenson, who, whatever his faults, had nothing in him of the cad, could not and would not do that. But he could and did speak plainly. He did not wish, he informed his partner, to have second or third-rate work bearing his name sent round to be derided and rejected. Henley, as his way was, argued stoutly in self-defence. Stevenson rejoined that the stage, so recently a gold mine, was now only a lottery and must not be preferred to honest drudgery. It would be folly to allow themselves to be lured by an *ignis fatuus*, only to be landed in a worse and deeper bog. Besides, "the lockers were empty"; Number 17 Heriot Row had already been "bled" somewhat beyond the bounds of reason, and parents could not be supposed to have inexhaustible funds to distribute. Stage heroics were very pretty; but meanwhile the pressing, everlasting problem of bread and butter had to be faced. No! play-writing would not do. Let Henley get back to his journalism, and he, Stevenson, would go on with his stories. Necessity, as most of us know, is a hard driver; but those

are tart passages from "my dear boy" to "my dear lad." As yet, however, there was no breach nor open sign of one. Henley went back to his journalism (nursing a sense of grievance), and the old familiar mode of address continued for some time longer.

On his birthday, November 13, Stevenson, with unusual fervour, wished "long life to our friendship." Was he conscious that that friendship had suffered shattering damage? At any rate, "the lady methinks protesteth too much", as if with an uneasy feeling that the seeds of discord had been sown. Stevenson, however, far more than Henley, had the enviable gift of turning his back upon what was disagreeable and proceeding as if it did not exist. He turned now with unabated zest to what he considered his own proper work. Once for all he realised that in story-telling, not in play-writing, lay his real hope of success. Besides, in that direction the omens were encouraging. "Treasure Island" had made a palpable hit. If the "hundred jingling golden quid" he received for it did not fill his purse to overflowing, the success of the book gave his reputation an enhanced "market value." The general reader was beginning to take a paying interest in him; very luckily, for capital was low.

To help, his wife finished most of the stories begun as an amusement for the sick-room at La Solitude. In health Stevenson himself was "all smashed up."

There were more hæmorrhages, happily less serious than those of the year before, but prostrating in their effects. Sleep failed, and he took morphine for his cough, his "donkey's bray", as he called it, and found the drugged brain dull and listless. Thus the task of finishing the series "More New Arabian Nights" fell almost wholly to his wife. Stevenson revised and suggested; but his actual share of the completed work consisted of one story, "The Explosive Bomb", a poor enough specimen of his art.

### A TRIFLE OF MORALITY

Early in November he was heartened by a request from the *Pall Mall Gazette* for a story of eight thousand words, the price to be five pounds per thousand. He undertook the commission eagerly, but could not carry it out. Morphine and sleeplessness combined induced a stupor which overpowered his faculties, and he was forced to confess himself beaten. His short story "Markheim" was available, but was found unsuitable. In this dilemma he unearthed "The Body-Snatcher", written three years before at Kinnaird Cottage, Pitlochrie, and laid aside as too crudely gruesome for publication. Evidently the *Pall Mall Gazette* was in search of something supersensational for its Christmas readers. At any rate, it was so taken with "The Body-Snatcher" that it not only welcomed the story, but sent out sandwich-

men to advertise it with such hideously grotesque posters that the police were obliged to interfere. With the author there ensued a comedy in little. Since he gave old stuff and bad stuff, he refused to take the full price of forty pounds. When Henley, his commercial as well as his literary adviser and agent, expostulated, he retorted grandly, "What are we, artists or City men?" as if artists should immolate themselves on the altar of the ideal, while City men were free to luxuriate in the gross delights of material opulence. Perhaps he was thinking of Burns, who declined to take payment from the egregious Thomson for gems of immortal song. Certainly he forgot the dictum of that stern, unbending old Tory, Samuel Johnson, that none but a fool would decline to write for money and as much of it as he could get. But, then, Johnson had from the start to earn his own living as best he could, whereas Stevenson could afford fine airs — at his father's expense. Doting fathers with long purses are so convenient in a delicate crisis of sentiment and honour. "The Body-Snatcher", declared the outraged moralist, was not worth forty pounds, and "I will be damned if I steal with my eyes open." On that fetching text he delivered a sermon on the morality of authorship which the guilty Henley must have read with a sardonic grin. On one point at least Stevenson was incontestably right about himself — that, given

the chance, he could not help preaching. Just then, too, it may be, he desired to give his "dear" but troublesome "lad" a warning rap over the fingers.

In the midst of such agitations and drawbacks he wrote "A Humble Remonstrance", and the essay on "Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature", which appeared in *Longman's Magazine* for December, 1884, and the *Contemporary Review* for April, 1885. The first arose out of a friendly controversy between Walter Besant and Henry James. Besant had lectured on the art of fiction, taking, as those who knew him will readily understand, a strictly utilitarian, almost mechanical, view of the craft of novel-writing. James, an artist to his finger-tips, but inclining strongly to French naturalism, answered; and Stevenson, intensely interested, struck in with "A Humble Remonstrance", which in substance is an eloquent plea for his favourite theory, that the first business of the story-teller is to tell a story, not to lose himself in minute or tedious analysis, and that romance is of the essence of the game. The essay on Style has been much criticised; but it is at least interesting as the cause of sharp division among experts, and to young authors must always be suggestive, if not quite convincing. It was written while its author "sat on Charon's pierhead" as the result of a hæmorrhage and was forbidden to speak — a tribute at once to his courage and his power of concentration.

## NEW HOPES AND A GREAT INDIGNATION

The opening of the year 1885 found him in bounding spirits over an invitation from his friend Andrew Lang, then editing a series of "British Worthies", to contribute a volume on Wellington. He accepted joyously; and was so confident of big results that he refused the hundred pounds offered in payment, preferring "some sort of royalty." Forthwith the study of military history became his absorbing passion. Perhaps nothing better illustrates Stevenson's perennial boyishness than his instant ardour over any new enterprise that chanced to captivate his imagination. The "History of the Highlands" and the "Life of Hazlett" were taken up with consuming enthusiasm, and abandoned. Half a score of novels were planned or begun, and never finished. His course is strewn with such wrecks. Indeed, probably no writer of his generation put so much ardour and energy into schemes which came to nothing. Yet over each new venture he was as eager as if he had never known disappointment or ever been associated with a failure. Over "Wellington" he became ecstatic. At last, at last the masterpiece of which he had so long dreamed was to become a tangible fact; and in the end, health and strength failing, the masterpiece went to swell the list of wrecks.

It has been supposed, rather fancifully, that from

his studies for "Wellington" came the conviction that he had missed his destiny in not being a soldier. True, he had yearned for an active life; but, then, all imaginative writers at some time yearn to be men of action, just as men of action — Napoleon, for example — yearn to be men of letters. The fact that self-made pictures of a military career fascinated Stevenson is not at all strange. But desire is no proof of capability. A sailor, roaming from clime to clime, he might have been; a sailor, like Odysseus, he actually was; but no one with a right understanding of his temperament and the conditions of army service could ever think of him as a born soldier, save in the single quality of courage. This is not disparagement. There is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon, and another of the stars. Stevenson had his own rare and delightful qualities, but they were emphatically not of the military order.

While he was absorbed in preparations for "Wellington", an event happened which stirred him more deeply than any other external event of his whole life. In February, 1885, came the news that, after a long and gallant defence, Khartoum had fallen, and that the heroic Gordon was dead, forsaken, abandoned to a barbaric and ruthless enemy by a callous, ungrateful country. A wave of horrified indignation swept over the civilised world. In Britain the feeling was one of surging rage with vacillating, shuffling

politicians, as usual too intent on party cabals and petty lobbyings to care for the honour of the Empire or the fate of a beleaguered hero giving his life for his country. At Windsor, Victoria fulminated against her Prime Minister for breach of faith; at Bournemouth, Robert Louis Stevenson echoed her fulminations, with flaming additions of his own. In both cases it gave a keener edge to wrath and disgust that the Prime Minister was William Ewart Gladstone, whom Victoria heartily disliked and Louis had been taught from his tenderest years to detest. Moreover, to Stevenson the shameful tragedy was made yet blacker by callousness. He was informed that when the news came Millais was painting Gladstone's portrait. The painter was overcome; the politician (so it was said) remarked unconcernedly, "Why! it's the man's own temerity." Stevenson could scarcely contain his anger and his loathing. In connection with the "Wellington" volume he had been on the point of writing to "the Grand Old Man", softened, as he owned, by the thought of the Premier's age and long service. Such a letter was now out of the question, since the only possible signature must be "Your Fellow-criminal." For he too was guilty — guilty of a craven silence, when he ought to have put the trumpet to his lips and roused his countrymen while yet it was possible to act. England, he wrote to Symonds, stood before the

world "dripping with blood and daubed with dishonour." And he, a cowardly bourgeois, had not lifted a finger to avert the shame. There lay the disgrace, the sting.

In Gordon's character and career there was much to evoke the sympathy and admiration of Stevenson. The man's glorious knight-errantry, his quixotic chivalry, his almost fanatical zeal for ideals, his absolute fearlessness, his self-sacrifice, his dauntless striving in war and peace to be the pattern of a Christian gentleman, exemplifying in conduct the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount — all this deeply impressed the imagination of Stevenson. And now the forsaken hero and saint had perished by treachery, his severed head a thing of mockery in the hands of the gloating Mahdi. The thought brought sorrow, shame, and disgust. To-day it may be regretted it did not occur to him to write the biography of his hero. Certainly the subject would have been more congenial, more inspiring and fruitful than the hard, narrow, centered, successful, unromantic Wellington. For Gordon was romance incarnate, the best of romance since it was reality.

But other and closer matters were pressing on his attention. At last, after innumerable difficulties and transmutations, "A Child's Garden of Verses" was out of hand, and appeared in March with the imprint

of Messrs. Longmans, Green and Company. "Prince Otto", our old friend "The Forest State", after similar transmutations, was also finished, ran serially in *Longman's Magazine* from April to October, and was then immediately published by Messrs. Chatto and Windus. In May came "More New Arabian Nights", an "eccentric mass of blague and seriousness", yet, as he thought, "singularly varied and vivid." These works coming so closely together made the year 1885 appear one of phenomenal productiveness. But in reality, as has been shown, they were mostly the fruits of long labour in California, in Scotland, at Davos and Hyères, though the final revisions were made at Bournemouth. "A Child's Garden of Verses" was dedicated to Cummy in lines now familiar to all the world. Of the contents of the little volume its author held no very exalted opinion. He would not call them poetry, only pleasant childish rhymes with quaint conceits, which might amuse such as care for childish things. In effect he was disposed to agree with the genial autocrat:

> Don't mind if the index of sense is at zero
> Use words that run smoothly whatever they mean.
> Leander and Lilian and Lilliebullero
> Are much the same thing in the rhyming machine.

Nor were his friends moved to any marked enthusiasm. Yet of all his books "A Child's Garden" is the one which readers have taken most fondly to

their hearts, and its popularity rather increases than diminishes with the passage of time.

### A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE

Of "Prince Otto" his opinion was different. On no other of his stories did he lavish so much pains. Parts of it were written and rewritten eight and ten times, and the whole underwent such drastic recasting that in the end little of the original draft remained. Perhaps because of this enormous labour it held a special place in his affections. He meant it to be a masterpiece, and in his heart he thought it was. But readers have always regarded it shyly, and its critics have been severely critical. On its appearance in book form Henley reviewed it generously and Meredith sent a word of glowing appreciation. But in general it had what is called a bad, or at any rate a lukewarm, Press. Some reviewers treated it with condescension as "a pretty piece of writing"; others were downright hostile. A few were sarcastic. One called it "a child's book", and another a "Gilbert comedy." Over the last designation Stevenson was deeply offended, first because the story was not meant to be comic, and next because he despised W. S. Gilbert and all his works. In the downright style the *Saturday Review* was especially conspicuous, and from his protests to friends it is evident Stevenson felt the criticism. To Henley and

others he defended both Otto and Seraphina, contending that "the romance lies precisely in the freeing of two spirits from Court intrigues." What particularly wounded and depressed him was that even professed guides in literature gave an author no credit for aiming high.

As for the public, he declared in his irritation, it relished sheer sloppiness, with a heavy mixture of dullness and pomposity. Finally, to an American correspondent, R. H. Stoddard, he cited the story as an example of "the difficulty of being ideal in an age of realism." Two years before, in "A Gossip on Romance", he had written: "English people of the present day are apt, I know not why, to look somewhat down on incident and reserve their admiration for the clink of teaspoons and the accents of the curate." He now gave them romance of a high kind, and because they would not have it, he was chagrined and resentful. He had put his whole strength, his whole skill as an artist, into "Prince Otto", and neither the critics nor the public appreciated his effort.

It may be permissible to interpolate here a small personal reminiscence. By chance it happened that "Prince Otto" was the first of Stevenson's books which I read. It had been some years published, when in the course of a literary discussion I heard it scornfully described as shapeless, invertebrate,

ridiculous, the product of a vain, overweening æsthete with nothing to give his readers but puerilities and absurdities wrapped up in a jingle of words. Listening, I remembered that to one discerning critic two generations earlier, "Sartor Resartus", probably the greatest book of its century in England, was no more than "a heap of clotted nonsense." What if this were another specimen of the same enlightened intelligence? My curiosity was stirred. "This book by R. L. Stevenson," I said, "must either be phenomenally bad or phenomenally good. I must discover which." Forthwith I got the story and read it, the adverse criticism still ringing in my ears. As I read the ringing grew fainter and fainter, died away and was forgotten. My immediate conviction — and it was very decided — was, "Whatever else this man can or can not do, most assuredly he can write." The artist in style was there beyond doubt or question.

I saw, of course, what it needed little discernment to see, that, as the critics pointed out, the book was in many parts overwritten, and that in general the characters lacked the vitality of genuine creations. Even inexperienced as I then was in such matters, I felt that the author had wasted much energy and ingenuity on creatures which, after all his trouble, did not come to life. A surer instinct, a little more creative force and grasp of imagination, would have obviated such waste. It is impossible to take any

lively interest in the fatuous Otto and his scheming wife; and the minor characters are mere puppets or dummies. So far, I agreed, the critics were right. But in face of all detraction, the style was a thing of beauty, even when, by misdirection, it missed its aim. In parts, too, it achieved a real expressiveness. The flight of the princess, when she finds the game is up and the mob invades the palace, stamps itself on the mind; and the whole forest scene appeared and appears to me vividly conceived and vividly presented. But, above all, it was the magic of the style that lingered like a clinging fragrance: "The glory of the great night laid hold upon her; her eyes shone with stars; she dipped her sight into the coolness and brightness of the sky, as she might have dipped her wrist into a spring: and her heart, at that ethereal shock, began to move more soberly."

If that is not style, I asked myself, where in later English prose is it to be found? Immediately I got other stories by the same writer. In my second choice I was fortunate; it was "Kidnapped." There was then a sort of Stevenson fever in the air, and I caught the infection severely. I went back to his earlier writings; and thenceforth while he lived I waited avidly for each new work bearing his name, as it came hot from the press.

In the spring of 1885 Stevenson began "Kidnapped" as a means of utilising his Highland studies,

drafted the opening chapters with delighted ardour, and broke down, health and invention failing, as they so often failed him. He had in hand another story which for the moment engrossed him more than the adventures of David Balfour. This was "The Great North Road", designed as a rattling, rousing tale of highwaymen, with all the favourite ingredients spiced to a pitch of sensational excitement. But it also was abandoned, to remain a fragment. Ten years later, when he was dead, it appeared in the *Illustrated London News*, then edited by Mr. Clement Shorter, and even to sworn Stevensonians proved a disappointment. Finding the larger work impossible — "it's the length that kills" was his own doctrine — he wrote "Olalla" for the Christmas number of the *Court and Society Review*.

In June came the distressing news of the sudden death in Edinburgh of his old friend and teacher, doubly both friend and teacher, Fleeming Jenkin. With the relations of the two men, and what the younger owed to the elder, I have already dealt. Here it need only be said that in his grief Stevenson perceived more and more clearly the sterling worth of the man he mourned, and now regarded with an affection that was almost worship. Later, at Mrs. Jenkin's request, he undertook to write the "Memoir" which is now prefixed to the volume of selections from Jenkin's literary and scientific papers.

The task brought thoughts of his youth flooding back upon him, that turbid and fantastic youth when he thought it clever to be blasphemous and manly to outrage Edinburgh sentiment and respectability. And Jenkin was the one man with courage enough to deride his derision, to scorn his egotism, and pluck him back from the abyss which in the end awaits the fool. Writing to Number 17 Heriot Row when he was actually engaged on the "Memoir", he said that every fresh detail, everything he read, made him think of Jenkin more nobly. "I cannot imagine how I got his friendship," he added in a burst of candour and gratitude; "I did not deserve it."

## "JEKYLL AND HYDE" — THE DELECTABLE AGENCY OF DREAMS

But through all his troubles, domestic and external, he worked with unceasing assiduity. Moreover, he was now working to some purpose. As usual, he wanted money, wanted it badly and at once, and perhaps he was ashamed to fall back so often on the generosity of Number 17 Heriot Row. He cast about for a story, something that could be produced rapidly, for the need was pressing; and after much vain searching wrote the allegory which was to carry his reputation round the whole English-speaking world and add a new expression to the English language — "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."

The supposed origin of that celebrated story has frequently been described. According to a statement, fondly accepted by the credulous, "Jekyll and Hyde" came to its lucky author, complete and rounded off, in a dream. Mrs. Stevenson has related picturesquely how one night Louis cried out horror-stricken, how she woke him up and he protested, "Why did you waken me? I was dreaming a fine bogy-tale." It is also related how he appeared next morning excitedly exclaiming, "I have got my shilling-shocker — I have got my shilling-shocker!" After long search and brooding, creative writers, it may be remarked, often exclaim ecstatically on finding what they wanted, so that Stevenson's experience is by no means rare.

The dream in literature is an old and pleasant fiction. A large book has been written on the subject, crammed with examples, ancient and modern, of all that authors have owed to the delectable agency of dreams. More than two thousand years ago Ennius, following a convention already established, averred that he dreamed his great epic of Rome, "The Annales." Coming to England, we find "Piers Plowman" ascribed to the same delightful source. Bunyan, Coleridge, De Quincey, all dreamed immortal works. In the first century of our era Persius satirised the fashionable notion of inspiration by dreams. "I never," he declared sadly, "had a sleep on Par-

nassus which resulted in my suddenly setting up as a poet." Goethe, too, remarked that nothing came to him in his sleep. Bunyan, like Ennius, was following a convention. It was different with Coleridge and De Quincey. "Kubla Khan" and "The Opium-Eater" were the results of opium. Does "Jekyll and Hyde" stand in the same category? Both before and during its composition Stevenson was taking drugs to an extent which clearly affected his brain. The drug-taker is a dreamer. Occasionally his dreams are glorious visions, as with De Quincey in the earlier stages of his debauches; more often they are hideous nightmares. In such a disturbance of brain and nerve Stevenson may well have been hag-ridden by such a piece of horror as he describes in his tale.

Besides, there were other causes. He had already dealt with a similar theme in delineating Deacon Brodie, the pious burglar of Edinburgh; and during sleep "the subconscious mind", which is the storehouse of garnered impressions, may have shot up old memories of that arch-villain and hypocrite. His own statement is, "All I dreamed of Dr. Jekyll was that one man was being pressed into a cabinet when he swallowed a drug and changed into another being." Quite obviously the cabinet was "a carry over" from the Deacon Brodie studies. When Stevenson was a child, there stood in his bedroom at Number 17 Heriot Row a cabinet, the actual handiwork of the

infamous deacon; to the boy it was an object of infinite curiosity and profoundly impressed his imagination. The impression was deepened by the play written in collaboration with Henley; and now, by the obscure action of a drugged brain and a fevered imagination questing for material, it was revived — with grotesque additions. Memory supplied the cabinet; the drug was actively present; the change of personality followed almost mechanically. Psychologically that is quite simple. The story, then, had its genesis in past experience, recalled and remoulded to new issues by a brain "functioning" in abnormal conditions.

And, indeed, the story, with its crude horrors and wild improbabilities, bears tolerably clear marks of its origin. The mode of composition, too, was significant. The first draft was dashed off in a frenzy of excitement, as if the gruesome picture had to be flung headlong on paper. In that form it was read to Mrs. Stevenson, who condemned it as an allegory made into a rather commonplace story like "Markheim." In the argument that followed Stevenson appears to have behaved with unusual heat of temper. Suddenly, to his wife's consternation, he ended the dispute by throwing the manuscript in the fire, as appeared, in a passion of anger. In reality it was his way of indicating that she was right, and that the tale must be remodelled and rewritten. That the reconstruc-

tion might be complete, it was better, he explained, to destroy the first draft, lest it might betray him into wrong methods. The second version, like the first, was produced at a white heat; indeed, the phenomenal speed has excited wide wonder and applause as an unparalleled feat in composition.[1] According to Stevenson's own account, the book was "conceived, written, rewritten, re-rewritten and printed inside ten weeks", with bankruptcy at his heels in the form of "Byles the butcher, whose wheels drive exceedingly swiftly." Byles may be a hard taskmaster, but occasionally he proves a very effective incentive and inspiration.

The story was finished and ready for publication late in the autumn of 1885, but for trade reasons it was held over until the middle of January, 1886, when it was published as "a shilling shocker" by Messrs. Longmans, Green and Company. Its immediate reception was not encouraging. Booksellers eyed it askance. It was a small book, the profit per copy would also be small, and the public appeared indifferent. But an article in the *Times*, written, I think, by James Payn, drew attention to its unusual qualities. In those happy days a review in a promi-

[1] By comparison, the feats of Byron and Scott, it is implied, sink into insignificance. But what of Beckford, who at twenty-two wrote "Vathek" at one sitting? "It took me," he relates, "three days and two nights of hard labour. I never took off my clothes the whole time." "Vathek" is as long as the old three-volume novel. "Jekyll and Hyde" runs to some thirty thousand words.

nent journal was "good for an edition." Immediately, in trade phrase, the book "began to move." Then other reviews appeared in quick succession. The *Academy*, in a notice which may be taken as typical, wrote enthusiastically: "It is many years since English fiction has been enriched by any work at once so weirdly imaginative in conception and so faultlessly ingenious in construction as this little tale." Another reviewer, writing perhaps, in the early hours of the morning, declared that "the reader scarcely breathes while the story proceeds." So the joyous chorus ran. And America was equally impressed. R. H. Stoddard thought it "exactly such a story as Poe might have written." A religious journal, the *Churchman*, found in it "the reasonable strangeness, the mysterious power of Edgar Poe, and the magic of some of Bulwer's stories." The *Critic* described it as "containing French grace of execution with a distinctly Saxon ethical method. Mr. Stevenson's 'Strange Case' follows in the Hawthorne line, because it offers both art and ethics in a remarkable union." James Payn, letting himself go in the New York *Independent*, characterised it as "a work of incontestable genius. Nothing by Edgar Allan Poe is to be compared to it. What is worth mentioning, otherwise a good many people would miss it, is that a noble moral underlies the marvellous tale."

The moral was not missed. On the contrary, it

was caught up and proclaimed with quite apostolic fervour. A Canon of the English Church, reading his *Times* over the matutinal bacon and eggs, noticed what was said of the book, became interested, procured a copy, read it; and, seizing so rare an opportunity, made it a text for a sermon to the elect in St. Paul's Cathedral. Other canons, vicars, and Nonconformist divines, following a distinguished lead, expounded the parable from scores of pulpits all over the land. As I can testify from experience, there is no more effective advertisement for a story than a series of sermons. "Get a novel into the pulpit," said a shrewd publisher to me, "and its fortune is made. It doesn't matter a brass farthing whether it is extolled or slated so long as it gets there." The moral which Mr. Payn feared might be missed proved, in fact, the salvation of "Jekyll and Hyde." Man's duality, the ceaseless war in his members between the forces of good and evil, is as old as the race. It came in with Adam, and will probably go out with Campbell's "Last Man", when he sees the darkening universe sink into everlasting night. But preachers, glad, doubtless, to get so rich a theme, treated the idea as if it were a new gospel, a new revelation given for the first time by Robert Louis Stevenson. It was first-rate business.

From the pulpit "Jekyll and Hyde" passed triumphantly to the boudoir, the drawing-room, and

the dinner table. Society took it up. It wasn't as good as Ascot, but it had something of the interest of a new dance or a hitherto unheard-of specimen at the Zoo. Elderly ladies of severely mid-Victorian minds shook their heads with a "My dear, it is dreadful." It was really too bad of this Mr. Stevenson, whoever he was, to expose the old Adam thus, in all his stark iniquity, to give such awful glimpses of the beast Caliban at his worst; but, well! yes, there was the not unpleasant shudder of the horrid thing; and at any rate it served as a convenient topic for small talk, like Mr. Darwin's apes or Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy. When a book is thus selected for honour it "booms" and "Jekyll and Hyde" was soon booming. For the million it had the supreme advantage of cheapness; the nimble ninepence (those were the days of twenty-five per cent. discount) sufficed for the new sensation. In a few months fifty thousand copies were sold; the printing-presses were going full speed, and the invalid-hermit of Skerryvore awoke one morning to find himself famous. It should be said that he showed no sign of intoxication. He had worked too hard, waited too long, endured too much, to lose his head over an unexpected success. But he would not have been human were he not elated and fortified.

Two criticisms of the time deserve to be particularly noted: one by John Addington Symonds, the

other by F. W. H. Myers.[1] As related by Mr. Horatio F. Brown in his admirable biography, Symonds doubted whether any one has the right "to scrutinise the abysmal depths of personality." "At least," he wrote to Stevenson, "I think he [the scrutiniser] ought to bring more of distinct belief in the resources of human nature, more faith, more sympathy with our frailty than you have done. . . . The scientific cast of the allegory will act as an incentive to moral self-murder with those who perceive the allegory's profundity. The suicide end of Jekyll," he added, "is too commonplace. Dr. Jekyll ought to have given himself up to justice. This would have vindicated the sense of human dignity which is so horribly outraged in your book." This is scarcely the tone of flattering pulpiteers; and, indeed, Stevenson must have felt that from the self-acclaimed apostle of romance, the scornful censor of the ugly and the realistic, "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" was indeed a strange production. Myers, an accomplished psychologist, directed his criticism to certain flaws in the psychology of the characters. Stevenson acknowledged its justice, but in excuse pleaded exceeding haste and the furious driving of those wheels of Byles the butcher.

I have dealt thus exhaustively with "Jekyll and

[1] F. W. H. Myers, poet, philosopher, critic, scholar, author of "St. Paul", "The Survival of Personality", and an "Essay on Vergil", which is probably the most luminous appreciation of that poet in the English language.

Hyde" because, by a curious stroke of irony, it marks an important turning-point in Stevenson's literary career. He was now on the highway to popular success, a figure at last in popular fiction. Henceforth it will not be necessary to dwell with so much detail on his successive books. The public had taken him up, and he was a celebrity on the strength, not of his best work, but of a "savage, gruesome parable" of some thirty thousand words written purely as a "pot-boiler." Such are the ironies and caprices of public taste and appreciation.

## CHAPTER III

### ESTABLISHED POPULARITY

With renewed energy, mental if not physical, he took up and finished "Kidnapped", which ran serially in *Young Folks*, as Mr. Robert Leighton has stated, throughout June and July, 1886, and was immediately published by Messrs. Cassell and Company. As we have seen, the story grew out of his studies for the abandoned "History of the Highlands", which, realising at last his own unfitness for the task, he bequeathed "to a more qualified successor." On his journey south from Strathpeffer, while still intent on that project, he bought from an Inverness bookseller a printed report of the trial of James Stewart for the Appin murder, with an analysis of the evidence. Instantly he saw — as what writer of romance would not see? — that here was first-rate material for a tale of adventure, even when it had been utilised for the History. To obtain local colour, he visited Appin with his father in the early summer of 1880, and despite wild weather spent several delightful days in Glenorchy, at Oban and Balachuilish, enlarging his knowledge and imbibing

the right atmosphere. The ultimate result was "Kidnapped", with its sequel, "Catriona." When the former story appeared in July, 1886, it was received by the reviewers with a resounding chorus of applause, the plaudits over "Jekyll and Hyde" being still reverberating. The *Times*, leading the orchestra, devoted upwards of a column to a eulogy of the new story, which it found "almost, if not quite, as fascinating as 'Treasure Island'." The *Spectator*, equally munificent of space, doubted whether "Mr. Stevenson will ever again come up to the freshness of 'Treasure Island'"; but was quick to add that in "Kidnapped" "he gives pictures of Highland character worthy of Sir Walter Scott himself." The *Literary World* yet more generously gave the story two pages of undiluted panegyric, with copious extracts to whet the appetites of prospective buyers. "The interest is sustained to the close," the reviewer wound up, "and the most fastidious reader will not be able to find a single dull page between the two covers." With equal enthusiasm, the *Daily News* considered "Mr. Stevenson's study of Highland character the best thing of the sort which has been written since 'Rob Roy'." The *World*, then edited by Edmund Yates, gave it a no less cordial review. The writer, I believe, was Mrs. Cashel Hoey, herself a novelist of charm and honourably distinguished among London reviewers for ready appreciation of

merit, and especially for generosity to new or comparatively unknown writers. Other journals, Metropolitan and provincial, wrote in a similar strain. Finally *Punch* gave his effective blessing in verse to —

A book you ought to read at once and read at once you will.

America also was enthusiastic. To one important reviewer the tale had "the minuteness of Defoe." Another averred that "Mr. Stevenson's work is meritoriously high even in comparison with the immortal works of the author of 'Waverley'." And from the Atlantic to the Pacific the reviews were plentifully sprinkled with the epithets "charming", "quaint", "delightful", "exciting", "fascinating", "irresistible." George Parsons Lathrop, an influence in the current criticism of the day, observed that "Mr. Stevenson is a master of language and cultivates assiduously those phrases which are known to be idiomatic", adding, rather oddly, "There is a daintiness of touch, a *dreamy freedom of invention* in his admirable fabrications which lend them a charm somewhat more ideal than that of Defoe." As supplement to all these judgments, Stevenson himself thought "Kidnapped" "a far better story and sounder at heart than 'Treasure Island'", and assuredly he was right.

One agreeable result of two unequivocal successes following close on each other was that, as he reported

to his father, he believed himself to be "floated financially." Yet the floating was still uncertain; for almost while making the glad announcement he inquired if he could have money for a contemplated trip to Scotland, "and if so how much?" The ordinary expenditure for the year, he thought, could be met from his own resources, but there was no chance of any surplus for travel or incidental holiday expenses. The continued "shortness of money" is explained partly by the heavier expenses of an invalid with a family to maintain; but mostly by the almost incredibly low rates he received for his work. Even for those days thirty shillings per thousand words for a story of the calibre of "Kidnapped" was something short of "hodman's wages." Yet it was more than twice the rate he was paid for "Treasure Island" and "The Black Arrow." *Young Folks* was doubtless an admirable journal for the youth of England, but clearly it did not pander to luxury by overpaying its contributors. Nor did publishers evince the smallest inclination to be extravagant in their terms. All that was soon to be changed, thanks to American intervention and enterprise; but in the meantime the booming Stevenson had to nurse a lean purse.

All through that busy and important time he was "a chronic sickist", often utterly prostrated and condemned to silence (a grievous inhibition) by repeated colds, hæmorrhages, fevers, insomnia, and the evils

that flow from these. "My work," he told his old friend, Mr. Will H. Low, "cripples along between bed and the parlour, between the medicine-bottle and the cupping-glass." When we read "Kidnapped" and thrill over the fight in the round-house of the brig *Covenant*, and admire the aplomb and resource of Alan Breck, and follow with eager interest the flight in the heather, at the end we may well let our thoughts hark back to that sick-room at Skerryvore, and the creator of it all, striving, and striving triumphantly, in gloom and weariness, to be vivacious and energetic. In the fiction of Stevenson's own generation there are stronger, greater books than "Kidnapped"; but surely none that was produced in a grimmer, more heroic struggle against Fate and circumstance.

## EXCURSIONS AND FRIENDS

To the toiling invalid it was a time of almost constant imprisonment. Nevertheless, in the intervals of comparative health he was able to make brief excursions from his prison-house at Bournemouth. In June, 1885, he and his wife, after a short stay in London, were at Cambridge with Mr. Colvin. It must, I think, have been in passing through London then that he paid the visit to the shop of Mr. Walter T. Spencer, the well-known bookseller of New Oxford Street, described in the interesting volume "Forty

Years in My Bookshop." "It was in the year 1885," relates Mr. Spencer, "that he made his one call on me. The day had been very wet, and he sat down wearily in a chair in my shop parlour to examine some pamphlets he had inquired about. He told me that one of his shoes leaked; and I suggested he should take it off and allow it to be dried, at the same time giving him a little brandy and water to keep off the cold" — a characteristic glimpse of the careless, semi-vagabond, free-and-easy Stevenson.

In August he extended his travels to the West of England, the picturesque Dartmoor being his objective. On the way the party, consisting of Stevenson, his wife, his cousin Mrs. Katherine de Mattos, Bob's sister, and his stepson, spent two or three days at the King's Arms Hotel, Dorchester. The Stevensons called on Mr. Thomas Hardy, who lived close by; next day Mr. Hardy returned the call, and there was vague talk of further meetings which never took place. For at Exeter Stevenson fell seriously ill — another hæmorrhage — and as soon as his strength permitted he was obliged to hasten back to Bournemouth. The solitary meeting is of exceptional interest. Already the author of "Far From the Madding Crowd" and "The Return of the Native" divided honours with Meredith as the first of living British novelists. Stevenson admired, even if he could not agree with, his elder's theories of art or his

interpretation of man's destiny and the ironic cruelties of Destiny. But when by and by "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" came like a challenge to vapoury conceptions of romance he dissented, disapproving of the heroine and all her ways; and there was no more exchange of courtesies. On his part, Mr. Hardy, I judge, never was, and is not, a Stevensonian.

Throughout the winter of 1885–1886 Stevenson was a close prisoner, seldom even venturing out into the garden. Partly for health reasons of their own, and partly to be near Louis, his parents spent the winter at Bournemouth. In April, chiefly for his father's sake, he accompanied them to London, where the party stayed for a few days at a quiet family hotel in Fitzroy Square, and then went on to the Smedley Hydropathic at Matlock, the well-known invalid resort in Derbyshire. "Kidnapped" was still unfinished, and, as often happened, its author was in difficulties over points of construction. With the end of David's adventures in the Highlands he had reached his limit of space, but not the end of the tale as it was designed. He took counsel with his friend and faithful adviser, Mr. Colvin, who "thought it a sin" to throw away such excellent material as David Balfour and Alan Breck. A compromise was suggested and adopted. The story was cut off abruptly, with promise of a sequel should "the long-eared public" show any desire to have one. The plan,

Stevenson explained to his father, would obviate the necessity of "butchering a lot of good material to no purpose." Besides, he felt confident of being able to do a second volume with "ease and pleasure." The sequel came seven years later in "Catriona", or "David Balfour", as it is entitled in America.

In June, having got "Kidnapped" out of hand, and again in August and October, he was in London with Mr. Colvin, who had exchanged the Slade Professorship of Fine Art at Cambridge for the post of Keeper of Prints in the British Museum. During the August visit of ten days he met several literary and artistic celebrities, in particular Robert Browning and James Russell Lowell, then American Ambassador to England. Long before, the young Stevenson had essayed, with some airs of superiority, to teach Browning the art of poetry; but there was no sign now that the genial poet and man of the world knew or remembered anything of the attempt.

Going direct from London, Stevenson and his wife joined the Henleys in Paris, for the double purpose of meeting Rodin, whom Henley knew, and Mr. and Mrs. Will H. Low, who were revisiting Europe. An account of that visit is given delightfully by Mr. Low in his fascinating book, "A Chronicle of Friendships." For a fortnight the Stevensons were the guests of the Lows at Number 12 Rue Vernier. Then suddenly one morning Stevenson announced that the holiday

must end. "Why?" asked the astonished Mr. Low. "Coin," was the succinct answer. Louis borrowed money enough to pay return fares — to discover later that a cheque from his father for one hundred pounds, sent expressly to pay for the Paris trip, lay uncashed. At the time Stevenson was much put out; and Mr. Low was as much puzzled, until two years afterwards in New York he learned the truth from Louis's mother. The incident is thus well authenticated. Otherwise it might seem not so much a mere lapse of memory as an absence of mind verging on imbecility. Whether there were hidden elements at work to cause so strange a piece of forgetfulness can only be conjectured. With his "good-bye" to Mr. Low he left Paris for the last time; and soon he was to leave places and things yet more dear for the last time.

Returning to Skerryvore, he took up in earnest the "Memoir" of Fleeming Jenkin, which was written with the direct personal assistance of Mrs. Jenkin, then at Bournemouth. To Stevenson, we may well believe, it was a labour of love, of admiration, of gratitude. Here was a chance to pay a lasting tribute to the worth of one who at every turn of a perfervid and by no means tranquil life gave assurance of a man; and he put into it all his available strength. If the "Memoir" does not rank high among his works, or among works of its kind, it is neverthe-

less a piece of honest portraiture, done with manifest sincerity and fidelity to truth — done, one may say, with a piety and reverence very beautiful in the whilom "atheist" whom Jenkin once rebuked so scathingly for blatant impiety. It was written in weakness, in languor and depression of spirits; but it was also written in affection, and the affection redeems all feebleness, all defects. "One should not write except upon that which one loves," said Renan. Inspired by the memory of many a kindness, many a service, Stevenson wrote from the heart; and the little work is to be read with the heart rather than with the head. He had long been impressed by Jenkin's fine spirit of piety, "bravely and trustfully accepting life", and by his "singular delight in the heroic." The piety and the heroism are well brought out, though to-day the portrait is valued less for its own or the subject's sake than for the sake of the painter. For it is curious to reflect that Fleeming Jenkin is remembered chiefly because of his associations with "the daft Louis Stevenson." Such are the satires of time. Moreover, as Stevenson wrote, old days, old feelings, old faces came crowding back upon him; so that in writing of Jenkin he was also writing of his own lost youth. Thus, apart from all questions of intrinsic merit, the brief biography holds a peculiar place in his life, since in effect it is a chapter of autobiography, often pathetic in its candour.

As time passed health did not improve. The winter of 1886–1887, the last that Stevenson was to spend in Britain, is again a sad record of weakness, with variations, now better, now worse, but ever woefully tending downward. Nevertheless, then and earlier, in intervals of ease he was able to enjoy the occasional society of his friends, whose visits would have been more frequent had his strength or spirits permitted. Henley, Baxter,[1] Bob Stevenson, and Mr. Colvin came, bringing a whiff of the old life, now so swiftly receding. And a new friend came whom Stevenson received with a deep and peculiar pleasure. The amicable controversy, already noted, over the art of fiction resulted in an animated correspondence with Henry James. Then one evening James's card was sent in at Skerryvore, followed immediately by the man himself. The visit was so entirely agreeable that it was repeated the next evening and the next, and afterwards many times while Stevenson remained at Bournemouth. The friendship which thus sprang up developed to one of ardency on both sides. In theory the two men were poles apart; but both were artists in letters, James, in his unobtrusive way, perhaps the finer, more delicate; so that, as with Carlyle and Emerson, they differed in opinion only. Probably the best, the most luminous and pene-

[1] Baxter was especially welcome. "Is that Charlie?" Stevenson would call from his sick-room the moment Baxter entered the house; and his smile of welcome for his old Edinburgh friend had a peculiar heartiness and affection.

trating, "appreciation" of Stevenson in the long roll of such productions came from the pen of Henry James, and may be read in his volume "Partial Portraits." It was written during that Skerryvore period when Stevenson was just "arriving" as a writer of adventure stories, and has the conspicuous merit of being written by one who was himself a novelist of rare distinction, and not a mere fatuous or flatulent theoriser about an art he never practised and in its deeper principles did not understand.

James was of course struck by the incongruous contrast between the life of the man and his work. "It seems too anomalous," he remarked, "that the writer who has most cherished the idea of a certain fine exposure should also be the one who has been most reduced to looking for it within, and that the figures of adventurers who, at least in the literature of to-day, are the most vivid should be the most vicarious." Of all the coterie which then surrounded Stevenson, James was, by temperament, by gifts and profession, by far best qualified to understand the novelist and the conditions in which he worked. The friendship founded on mutual sympathy and admiration grew swiftly to a confidential intimacy; and in the end James was named as Stevenson's executor, though for various reasons, personal and external, he ultimately declined the office.

There were other visitors who came as encouraging

indications of increasing popularity: John S. Sargent, an American artist of note, twice visited Skerryvore to paint the portrait, familiar by frequent reproduction, which shows Stevenson in all his "unspeakable slightness", a mere animated skeleton, in fact, but airily twirling a tiny moustache. "Excellent, but too eccentric to be exhibited," was his own judgment. Another American artist, J. W. Alexander, also came and made a drawing of his head, which, though pronounced good, presented the comic combination of "an Aztec idol, a lion, an Indian rajah, and a woman." Of local friends there were Sir Henry and Lady Taylor (to whom "The Merry Men" is dedicated) and their daughters, and Sir Percy and Lady Shelley. Of the latter a curious story is told. Finding in Stevenson a resemblance to the poet, Sir Percy's father, she conceived the idea that through some strange process of reincarnation he was her own son. Calling one day at Skerryvore, while Mrs. Thomas Stevenson was there, she created a scene by upbraiding the real mother for daring to purloin a son who was really *hers;* to such absurdities do hallucinations run. Yet another who came both as physician and friend was Doctor T. B. Scott, whose services are gratefully commemorated in the general medical dedication to "Underwoods."[1]

During that winter at Bournemouth Stevenson wrote little. "Kidnapped" left him "worked out",

[1] Dr. Scott died recently while holding the office of Mayor of Bournemouth.

and the "Memoir" of Fleeming Jenkin, slight as it is, utterly exhausted him. To that time of exhaustion belongs "The Misadventures of John Nicholson", a crude, improbable murder story, the scene of which is laid in Murrayfield, a Western suburb of Edinburgh.[1] Chiefly, however, he was occupied in preparing "Underwoods" and "Memories and Portraits" for the press and in trying to make himself a musician. Several of his friends — Miss Taylor, Henley, and Bob Stevenson — were expert musicians, and he resolved to emulate, if not to rival, them. He began with the piano, "picking out the melody with one finger", while his stepson accompanied him on a tin whistle. "Dear powers! What a concerto!" he exclaimed in a letter to his father. "The neighbours in a radius of a furlong and a half are packing up in quest of brighter climes." One's sympathies go out to the exasperated neighbours. He soon abandoned the piano for the whistle, which in turn gave place to the flageolet — a favourite diversion as long as he lived. Of his musical talents, Henley, a very competent judge, observed that "he had no ear for intervals, his one tune for many years being 'Auld Lang Syne'." Yet Henley credited him with "an aery and delicate sense of rhythm." Not content with performances on the flageolet, he proceeded to composition, and pro-

[1] The house in which the crime is supposed to have been committed is still pointed out to the curious visitor.

duced a threnody which was the subject of much banter and not a little satire.

### THOMAS STEVENSON

But more serious things were engaging his heart and thoughts. Again his father and mother were at Bournemouth, where they had taken a furnished house; but this time the real invalid was Thomas Stevenson. For years the once strong, masterful man had been dwindling into senility, and now he was in a pitiable condition. His malady was only too plain. In the tragic words of Swift, he was "withering at the top." Temperamentally he was disposed to gloom, and there had been much in his life, much for which Louis was responsible, to develop and deepen the natural disposition. To other evils was now added an attack of jaundice which left him miserably old and tottering. His moods were variable and at times trying. Suddenly and without cause he broke into frenzies of temper that distressed and terrified all about him. But for the most part he was pathetically docile, with a tremulous, childish concern for Louis. "Take care, dearie," he would say, kissing him as if he were again back with the little Smout at Number 17 Heriot Row. "Take care, dearie." While he was in that state some of his friends thought it an opportune moment to agitate for a public recognition of his services to the cause of navigation. A

knighthood was suggested and vigorously canvassed; and Louis was, of course, passionately interested. But the London clique, as he called it, was either hostile or indifferent; or, it may be, the wire-pullers did not quite understand the business they undertook; or, likelier still, Thomas Stevenson had forgotten party funds. At any rate, politicians were not just then interested in lighthouses, and nothing came of the scheme. When one considers how the majority of such "honours" are bestowed, the real distinction to a self-respecting man is to remain untitled. Louis was disappointed and angry; but Thomas Stevenson was beyond caring for such baubles.

In February, 1887, his wife took him to Torquay, hoping against hope; but by the 1st of April he was back at Bournemouth without benefit. The situation was made the more pathetic by the fact that Stevenson himself was too ill either to help or to cheer. His father's one wish now was to be taken home; and on April 21, after three weeks more beside his son, he and his wife left Bournemouth for Edinburgh, an invalid-carriage being engaged for the journey. For Louis it was farewell to his father. The end of so much was at hand. The father on whom in every crisis, every need, he had depended, whom he had tried so sorely and whose goodness had never failed, was passing from him in the darkness of shattered mind and body. Little wonder he was deeply affected.

Yet it is characteristic that at that very time he conceived what was probably the most wildly fantastic idea of his whole life. Intermittently he took a theoretic interest in politics; the "condition of Ireland question" was then furnishing the world with sensations, and Stevenson, ever eager for adventure, planned a dramatic intervention. Eighteen months before, a Kerry farmer, John Curtin, was murdered in his home by "a party of Moonlighters", the picturesque successors to the old Fenians. There had been a brave defence, and one of the attacking party was shot. In the result the Curtin family was boycotted, and the boycott was still in force. Here was a chance to enter a flaming protest against the reign of lawlessness. Stevenson, thirsting for the glories of martyrdom, proposed to rent the Curtin farm and proceed there with his family. To-day the incident is worth recalling, merely as showing how little Stevenson understood either Irishmen or their problems.[1]

But other and more urgent matters diverted him from his course. Suddenly he was summoned to Edinburgh. On the 6th of May he travelled north with his wife, arriving on the 7th to find that his father, though insisting on being "on his feet", did not know him. Next day, May 8, Thomas Steven-

[1] I lived five years in Ireland, and from actual observation knew something of the matters which agitated Stevenson. His presence in Kerry in the character of martyr would have provoked nothing deadlier than derision.

son died, leaving Louis with ghastly, haunting "images of sickness, decline, and impaired reason." To the Reverend W. Robertson, D.D., I am indebted for an impression of Stevenson as he then appeared to eyes that were sympathetically observant. Doctor Robertson writes:

"The only occasion on which I met Robert Louis Stevenson, so far as I remember, was on the day of his father's funeral. I have a vivid recollection of the occasion, although it was six-and-thirty years ago. It was a bright May day. Heriot Row was bathed in sunshine, and the fresh green leaves of the trees in the gardens opposite were shimmering in the sunlight. As I walked along, the stillness of the quiet street was broken by the pattering of horses' feet as a long line of carriages drove up to the door of the house with the darkened windows. On entering, one was shown into the dining-room, where already one or two men were seated. It was a typical old Edinburgh dining-room, with its long dining-table and its massive sideboard, surmounted by the circular mirror which was the fashion of the time. As I entered the room R. L. S. came forward and shook hands with me, offering me a few words of thanks for having come, and led me to a seat. These were the only words I heard him speak, although he welcomed several others in the same way as they arrived. He stood at the end of the room between the table and

the sideboard with two friends beside him. Who these were I cannot remember, but they remained standing throughout the service. Robert Louis himself looked a pathetic figure as he stood there silent and apart. His thin, spare figure, his pale cheeks and his downcast eyes, with his depressed and forlorn look, must have appealed to everyone present. One's heart felt drawn towards him with a sympathetic pity. Knowing as I did the story of his career and the anxiety he had been to the father now lying there so still, I felt sorry for him. He seemed to me a sad man 'thinking his own thoughts'; but this may have been merely my own thought, for of what he himself was thinking he gave no word or sign. When the service was ended we went to our respective carriages, and the solemn cortège moved slowly onwards to the cemetery."[1]

### FAREWELL TO EDINBURGH AND TO BRITAIN

Stevenson caught cold, and was not allowed to accompany the funeral cortège on its short journey from Heriot Row to the new Calton cemetery. For three weeks he kept to the house, writing the tribute to his father which appeared in the *Contemporary Review* for June and is now included in the volume

[1] Doctor Robertson knew Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Stevenson intimately. It is interesting to note also that his brother-in-law was R. M. Ballantyne, the hero and model of the young Louis Stevenson.

"Memories and Portraits."[1] During his stay there was yet another consultation with doctors; and the oracles decided that he must quit Britain forthwith, either for Colorado or some hill-station in India. By the end of May he was able to return to Bournemouth, travelling from Princes Street station. Though he did not guess it, here too was an end. For on the city which meant so much to him, which was, in fact, an indelible, ineradicable part of his life, he was never again to set eyes. The great pilgrimage, the great exile had begun. From an open cab he took his last look at Princes Street, with its gardens just then putting on their summer bloom; at the gaunt, frowning rock he had so often tried to climb; at the castle where, from his nursery, he used with childish glee to hear the bugles blow. Heriot Row, Colinton, Swanston, the Braids, the Pentlands, all that once made home, were henceforth to be mere "shadow-shapes of memory." The train steamed out; and the place that knew him was to know him no more for ever. And Edinburgh, all unwitting, went her heedless way, never dreaming that she had lost her most illustrious son since Scott.

For nearly three months longer he remained at Skerryvore. There was some work to be got out of hand, proofs of "Underwoods" and "Memories and

[1] Though Stevenson worked at Number 17 Heriot Row, he slept at Number 12 Walker Street, the residence of his uncle, Doctor George W. Balfour.

Portraits" to be passed for press, and the final revision given to the "Memoir" of Fleeming Jenkin. All these things he did diligently to the last item, while preparations for departure went on about him. Then, work done, he turned to the grave problem of the future. In the course of family discussions of ways and means and prospects he expressed a wish that wherever he went his mother should go with him. For a moment she hesitated. She was getting old, verging on sixty; she had a home of her own, sacred to her now by innumerable ties and memories. Could she uproot everything — the habits, the possessions, the sentiments and associations of a lifetime? "I cannot and will not go without you, mother," rejoined Louis. There was no more hesitation. "Very well, dear, I will go with you." The brave mother who had never denied her boy anything, who had stood by him when all else were hostile, could not deny him *this*. So Number 17 Heriot Row was put into the hands of an agent; that too was going in the general cataclysm of things, leaving a horrid void; but Louis wanted her, and that was enough. It was fated she was to be with him almost continuously to the end.

Meanwhile Stevenson was suffering such blackness of depression as he had never before known. Once again striking tent to march at the word of Fate into the unknown, leaving the only home he

had ever been able to call his own, a gift from him who was gone; and leaving it in such circumstances! Little wonder that gloom took possession of him. Nor was the gloom wholly, or perhaps mainly, due to his own sad situation: I have already remarked that he was little given to remorse. He had always managed to keep conscience at bay; but now, pricked by a hundred haggard and accusing memories of rebellion, of love, forgiveness, and overwhelming goodness, it had its way. Death, by making regrets unavailing, sharpens their sting. If only the dead could or would give us a chance to repent, to make atonement; but the dead never forgive.

Of Stevenson in the depth of one of his black moods at Skerryvore Sir Sidney Colvin gives an unforgettable picture: "I had followed him from the house into the garden," writes Sir Sidney in his recent and very charming book, "Memories and Notes." "He was leaning with his back to me looking out from the garden gate; as he heard me approach he turned on me a face such as I never saw on him save that once — a face of utter despondency, nay, tragedy, upon which seemed stamped for one concentrated moment the expression of all he had ever had or might yet have in life to suffer or renounce. Such a countenance was not to be accosted, and I left him"; surely a tragic glimpse of our laughing philosopher. Nor was the mood rare or surprising. He was su-

premely human, and to be human is sometimes to feel the cold clutch of despair. Stevenson would have been neither the man nor the writer he was had he been blind or insensible to human conditions and destinies, particularly when life's tragedies and ironies touched himself.

By the middle of August all was ready. The heavy packing was done; Skerryvore was let; there remained only a brief period of waiting and farewell to the old home. On Saturday, the 20th, the family left for London, staying for convenience at a private hotel in the City — Arnfield's, Finsbury Circus. On Sunday, the 21st, Stevenson saw several of his friends — Henley, Mr. Colvin and others — and was hilariously gay. "If the world is a bad farce, by gaiety we make it a good one." So the comic mask was reassumed. His friends were both amazed and enchanted by his exuberant vivacity, not suspecting, perhaps, that it was in great part the reaction of hysteria. During the short stay he added a codicil to his will, not without difficulty in getting it executed in proper legal form. With equal difficulty he procured a copy of the only book he desired to take with him, Mr. Hardy's novel, "The Woodlanders", a significant choice.

On Monday the party went on board the steamship *Ludgate Hill*, at the Albert Dock, Tilbury. It consisted of Stevenson, his wife, his mother, his stepson,

and Valentine Roch, a Swiss maid of remarkable intelligence, who many years later wrote some interesting reminiscences of her master.[1]

Mr. Colvin, ever faithful, was there to say goodbye, and was the last of his English friends to shake hands with Stevenson. The parting over, the *Ludgate Hill* moved slowly from her berth and headed downstream through the crowded shipping of the Thames. Stevenson stood on deck waving backward till his diminishing figure faded and was lost in a forest of masts and funnels.

[1] The *Ludgate Hill* had an exciting record. A ship of 4,000–5,000 tons she sailed between London and New York with "assorted cargoes." She carried a few cabin passengers and some steerage. Later she passed from the Hill Line to the Allan Line, which in turn was absorbed by the Canadian Pacific Line. She saw service in the Great War, and as the *Levonia*, was, I understand, sunk by a submarine.

## CHAPTER IV

### HAIL, COLUMBIA!

From London the *Ludgate Hill* proceeded to Havre, where she took in an incongruously assorted cargo of horses, cattle, and monkeys, the latter a consignment for an American menagerie. The ladies of the Stevenson party were shocked, first by the dirt and discomfort of the ship itself, and next by the mixture of pungent, pervasive odours from such a medley of livestock. Louis, however, disdained such trifling obstacles to enjoyment. Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat; who preaches happiness should himself be happy. To be in character, Louis must needs take the novel experience as one more amusing incident in the joyous adventure of life. Stable smells, he discovered, were "good for health", and if his simian fellow-travellers exhaled perfumes which in no wise suggested Araby, they were engagingly intelligent and companionable, one Jacko, a most discriminating ape, being wholly charming in his manners. Stevenson, indeed, found him far more agreeable than a certain nameless human passenger whom he promptly dubbed "the bore" because of his extreme

loquacity. Unfortunately the bore has not left us his *per-contra* opinion.

The voyage began in delightful calm and sunshine; but off the Irish coast the weather changed suddenly, and, in sailor-language, continued dirty throughout, with a harassing head wind, at times increasing to a gale. Progress was slow, for a cattle-boat is not as an Atlantic liner that defies the storm and (barring accidents) keeps the time-table to a tide. Stevenson, always an excellent sailor, enjoyed the tossing; as the phrase goes, he never missed a meal, and for the most part his spirits were keyed to concert pitch. On board the *Devonia* he had worked with desperate energy, the need being desperate; now he attempted no work of consequence; but it is interesting to note that the dedication of "Memories and Portraits" to his mother, "In the name of past joy and present sorrow", is dated from the *Ludgate Hill*, "within sight of Cape Race." Early one morning he roused the whole party to see the Cape; and they got soaked without seeing anything more capelike than the semblance of a cloud dimly outlined in the sogging mist. In that region of dank, swathing sea fogs, clammy and penetrating almost as an Edinburgh haar, he caught cold, though his spirits remained undamped.

On Wednesday, September 7, the *Ludgate Hill* reached New York, and Stevenson landed in all the

éclat of a miniature ovation. Mr. Low, representing American friends and admirers, was there to receive him and see him installed at the Hotel Victoria on Broadway and Twenty-seventh Street. There, by a graceful act of appreciation, the whole party were (unknown to themselves) the guests of Mr. Charles Fairfield, of Newport, Rhode Island, who, though unable to be present, welcomed Stevenson by telegram. At the steamer and the hotel the now popular author was besieged by interviewers. For "Treasure Island", "Kidnapped", and especially "Jekyll and Hyde", had carried his name with resounding reverberations across the Atlantic. The big American public was interested in him, and the enterprising reporter was there, alert, inquisitive, competent, to give the public embroidered details of the distinguished arrival. When the American reporter gets "hot on the trail" he is unrivalled in the art of comprehensive, picturesque, full-blooded portraiture. It is an art but feebly understood in England, where, with some signal exceptions, the Press still retains traces of a Puritan ancestry and practises an almost Quaker-like demureness of demeanour. In particular, it uses the personal note diffidently and with a certain air of apology, as though abashed by the sound of its own voice, or oppressed by the idea that personalities of all kinds are inconsistent with British traditions of reserve and good breeding. In America the

personal note is as dominant as in the writings of Stevenson himself.

It was a happy conjunction, and as soon as he got his breath Stevenson talked with his usual engaging freedom. On their part the interviewers recognised the material for good "copy." The figure that caused a sensation in Bond Street would certainly not go unnoticed in Broadway or Fifth Avenue. Stevenson's appearance, in a word, was too good to be neglected, and the Press gentlemen, who tripped one another up on the steamer and carried the campaign into his bedroom at the hotel, provided their public with piquant and often romantic reading. His spidery figure, his un-British looks, his taste in clothes, his health, his family, his antecedents, his plans, were all described in picturesque detail. One gem of description deserves immortality: "Mr. Stevenson has a classic head from which issues a hacking cough" — a touch of realism which moved the unappreciative Mr. Stevenson to an outburst of wrath and profanity.

Hospitality to the distinguished stranger is with America a concern of national honour; and, being both large-hearted and warm-hearted, she dispenses it with overwhelming generosity. The day after his arrival Stevenson was whirled off, in charge of Mr. Lloyd Osbourne and Valentine Roch, to be the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Fairchild at Newport. There he

stayed a fortnight, mostly in bed; for to the cold caught off the Banks he added another caught on the journey to the beautiful New England resort, once the home of Bishop Berkeley. During his absence from New York a dramatised version of "Jekyll and Hyde" by T. R. Sullivan was presented at the Madison Square Theatre by Richard Mansfield, one of the most noted actors of the day. The theatre was so packed that Stevenson's wife and mother, who were eager to see the performance, could scarcely gain admittance; but Mr. Sullivan came gracefully to the rescue by placing the author's box at their disposal. It is odd to reflect that, despite his intense interest in the drama, Stevenson never witnessed a performance of any dramatic adaptation of his stories by another hand or of any play of which he was himself part author.

By the end of September he was back in New York, to experience all the raptures and some of the inconveniences of popularity. The contrast with his experiences of eight years before must have been vividly and significantly in his mind. Then he had arrived forlorn, disowned, and almost destitute, on an adventure undertaken at the hazard of his life and the certain sacrifice (as it seemed) of nearly all that was dear to him in the past. With other immigrants he had gone trundling to the cheapest lodging-house to be found in the dreary region of the docks.

Bitterer still to the pride and hope of the aspiring author, he had been turned, politely but firmly, from the doors of publishers and editors who would have none of the wares he offered. Now he returned in the character of a conquering hero, to find those same publishers and editors eager to have anything from his pen. Such is the magic of public appreciation.

His hotel became a temporary Mecca to the elect; and as was his free-and-easy custom, he received visitors in bed, amid the customary litter of pillows, papers, books, and cigarette ends. Some were secretly scandalised by his rather blatant untidiness; more were charmed, and all were amazed, by his abounding vivacity. It seemed an incredible thing that the wasted, skeleton-like figure in the tattered, dabbled yellow dressing-gown, with a rug or blanket about his shoulders, should set an infectious example of sprightliness and gaiety. They did not understand that gaiety was his cue and bed his chosen place, since there he was free from the restraints of drawing-room manners and drawing-room clothes. He had, of course, to be mindful of his health; but in reality the sparkling invalid propped among pillows was in the nature of a dramatic piece of stage setting. Among those who were introduced to him by the loyal and helpful Mr. Low were Mr. Charles Scribner, of Charles Scribner's Sons, whose imprint is so

pleasantly familiar to American readers, and E. L. Burlingame, then editor of *Scribner's Magazine*, both of whom were to become his intimate and valued friends. Another whom Mr. Low introduced was Augustus St. Gaudens, the distinguished sculptor, who paid Stevenson several visits to make studies for a bas-relief depicting the subject in bed, of which a medallion replica with slight modifications has been placed as a mural memorial in the High Kirk of St. Giles, Edinburgh.

Shrewdly aware of his new value, Burlingame invited Stevenson to contribute a series of twelve essays to twelve consecutive numbers of *Scribner's*, the remuneration to be $3,500 (£700). More dazzling still, Mr. S. S. McClure, a man of large and generous imagination then at the beginning of his well-known newspaper enterprises, came a little later with an offer of $8,000 (£1,600) for the serial rights of his next story; and to top the flowing tide, the New York *World* offered him $10,000 (£2,000) for one article per week for a year. Here was fame materialising in dollars with dramatic suddenness. At last, then, at last "the dibbs", of which in the horrors and starvation of the Californian days he had written so pathetically to Henley, were coming in an avalanche of gold. A little light-headed, perhaps, from the intoxicating experience, he declared they were demoralising him. The prices offered were

far too high for a modest author whose ambition in finance did not soar beyond a moderate competency.

Besides, all those eager editors, who came flourishing their cheque-books, were ludicrously over-estimating the value of his work. With the business man it is an axiom that an article is worth what it will fetch in the market; but Stevenson, whose too sensitive conscience had boggled at the £40 paid by the *Pall Mall Gazette* for a drivelling short story, had another attack of artistic morality. Once again he "would be damned if he stole with his eyes open." His modesty was so far conquered that he accepted Burlingame's terms; but the $8,000 for a story, he insisted, should be cut down by half; and with admirable judgment he waved the *World* temptation aside.

Regarding his own powers and limitations he was rarely mistaken. He was not a cloud-compeller with a genius equal to any task that might be suggested by interest or idolatry. He knew that an article every week for a great popular newspaper was beyond him. To attempt it would have been torture, and (as a later experiment was to prove) a grave menace both to his reputation and his self-respect. Yet the swelling flood that bore him upward so buoyantly and gloriously gave new and delicious sensations, and, being human, he was immensely elated. From a calculation of the payment made by *Scribner's*, I make out that the rate was roughly ten guineas per

thousand words, not exorbitant as rates are now reckoned, but a delectable and inspiring contrast to the ten shillings of *Young Folks*. Thenceforward his rates were among the highest paid to popular writers of the day.

New York, with its enchantments, its incense and romance, was intoxicating; but it was not to be thought of as a permanent home. Undecided whither to turn, Stevenson was advised to try the Adirondacks, then coming into notice for the tonic qualities of their air. Mrs. Stevenson and her son were dispatched to spy out the land — with the result that a cottage, or, rather, part of one — the Baker Cottage, as it has come to be known — was rented at Saranac Lake. To the courtesy of Mr. Livingston Chapman, the devoted and energetic secretary of the Stevenson Society of America, I am indebted for the following interesting particulars of Stevenson's residence there:

STEVENSON AT SARANAC LAKE

"Robert Louis Stevenson arrived in Saranac Lake October 3, 1887. His intention had been to go to Colorado, but ill health necessitated a change of plan. The work of Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau in the outdoor treatment of tuberculosis had been received so favourably in the medical world, it was decided to make the trip to the Adirondack village. It was

hardly even a village at that time. A more fitting classification would be 'hamlet.' None of the residences or buildings of to-day were dreamed of then. The daily train did not come into the hamlet, but stopped at a station just outside. Conditions were naturally primitive, and, despite Stevenson's love of occasional gipsy life, travelling with a donkey, tempting Fate in canoe voyages, etc., the crudeness of things grated on him. It is no disrespect to the inhabitants of the little place to say that there was hardly anyone (aside from Dr. Trudeau) who was congenial to him. The community was made up almost entirely of the pioneering type of person: men who hunted and trapped or who worked in the forests. There was, no doubt, a lack of interest on each side due to neither side really understanding the other. Men of the pioneering type are seldom in sympathy with those whose vocation is less strenuous than their own. Men of the artistic type, more keenly organised and of higher cultivation mentally, are not prone to find affinity with persons lacking in these qualities. Be this as it may, the fact remains that the villagers are said to have thought him 'queer,' and his evident unconcern about what they thought confirmed them in their appraisal of him.

"Despite his dislike of cold weather, the climate proved beneficial. The wonderful climate, with its health-giving properties, has since become a Mecca

for victims of tuberculosis and has restored many to their places in the world. It was this clear, bracing air that Stevenson, wrapped in a buffalo-coat, used to breathe as he paced the verandah of the little cottage. His readers will recall (in 'The Genesis of Ballantrae') where he says, 'I was walking in the verandah of a small cottage outside the hamlet of Saranac. It was winter, the night was very dark, the air clear and cold, and sweet with the purity of forests. For the making of a story here were fine conditions. "Come," said I to my engine, "let us make a tale."' And in this cottage were written many of the essays published in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1888, including 'A Christmas Sermon,' 'The Lantern-Bearers,' 'Pulvis et Umbra,' 'Beggars,' 'Gentlemen,' 'A Chapter on Dreams,' and others. It has been said, that Stevenson got his inspiration for the final chapters of 'The Master of Ballantrae' from Saranac Lake scenery. These chapters were subsequently written at Honolulu, following a favourite custom of his — that of describing places when at a distance from them. The posthumous essay on 'The Genesis of Ballantrae' is interesting as well as enlightening in this particular.

"That Stevenson was not entirely out of sympathy with his surroundings is shown by touches here and there in letters to friends during the winter of 1887–1888.

"As an offset to this, again, we have a number of instances where he rails at the cold and (sometimes) rain. But it should be taken into consideration that Stevenson preferred a mild climate to a cold one, regardless of the latter's beneficial effect on his health, and he was never really happy when the thermometer was registering low. The warmth and sunshine of the South Seas attracted him, but did not build him up as did the Adirondack period. Dr. Trudeau's invitations to visit and inspect the growing sanitarium (which has since attained great proportions) were declined with thanks. One recalls the well-known story of the doctor showing R. L. S. through the former's laboratory and displaying a test-tube in which tubercle bacillus was growing. The sight was repulsive to Stevenson and brought forth his remark: 'Trudeau, you are carrying a lantern at your belt, but the oil has a most disagreeable smell.'

"His case was what the doctors characterise as an arrested one. Although often weak and remaining in bed for a rest, he was not considered seriously ill and had no active symptoms. During conversation he was alert physically as well as mentally, and the lively imagination that gave birth to his stories seemed to generate an enthusiasm that called for 'action.' Rising, sometimes almost springing from his seat, he would pace the floor, gesticulating, em-

phasising his exposition of the topic by waving his hands or by an effective use of an eloquent forefinger. In moods of this nature the brilliancy of his thought and the quickness of his thought dominated the entire situation.

"He enjoyed skating, and the Adirondack winters gave ample opportunity for indulgence in that pastime. Mr. Charles Scribner writes: 'I remember very well when Mr. Stevenson started from New York for the Adirondacks. We were anxious about him, but I recall the first direct word from him that came to me was a telegram for a pair of skates.'

"The wooden mantelpiece in the living-room of the cottage at Saranac Lake shows several little burns from cigarettes laid down at times by R. L. S. when in the excitement of conversation. These traces hardly met the approval of the persons from whom he rented the house, and it is rather amusing, as well as unfortunate, that their recollections of him are more dominated by these incidents than by ones of more importance. His habit of smoking in bed was the cause on two or three occasions of damage to the sheets. This is joined to the foregoing 'offences' in the recollections mentioned. Smoking was not particularly good for him, but he enjoyed it (as his frequent rolling of long, thin cigarettes testified). His life-long friend, Will H. Low, relates, in his delightful brochure entitled 'Stevenson and Mar-

garita', a fruitless quest in later years for a certain brand of tobacco that had been a favourite with them.

"An incident of Stevenson's humour, leavened with indignation (or vice versa), is found in the note written by him regarding the flavour of some mutton which had been sent by the Saranac Lake butcher. At this time, as has been stated, there was no railway right into the village, and the freshness of supplies could not always be guaranteed. Thirty years later the recipient of the note presented it to the Stevenson Society. It reads: 'Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson presents his compliments to Mr. Oldfield, and begs to return him the remainder of a joint of mutton which he refuses either to eat or pay for. Fillet of beef had been ordered as far back as Monday. Mr. Stevenson can readily understand there might arise some difficulty in supplying that; but at least Mr. Oldfield knew that Mr. S. would want something on Thursday; and Mr. S. prefers to hope it was in error that Mr. O. sent him anything so perfectly uneatable as the joint of which he now has the pleasure to return him part.'"

The journey to Saranac by Plattsburg (where the party made a two days' halt) and Loon Lake took them through a country which Mrs. Thomas Stevenson described as "very like Perthshire as it may have been two hundred years ago." The final stage of

twenty-five miles was made in a pair-horse buggy over corduroy roads, a mode of travelling sometimes humorously recommended as a specific for liver-complaint. The season was the beginning of the Indian summer, when Nature, putting on her autumn splendour of colours, breathes richly of peace and plenty. Usually at that time the air is delightful; but, as so often happened, Stevenson was unfortunate in weather. He was caught in a cold spell with gusty wind and drizzling rain; but, muffled to the eyes, he completed the journey without ill effects.

The Baker Cottage, which for some six months was to be his home, was the property of Andy Baker, hunter and guide, who had retired into what was then "the Adirondack wilderness", and there in pioneer fashion built a shanty for himself and his wife. Painted a crude, glaring white, with violently green shutters, and fitted with a capacious verandah, it stood high on a bluff, with hills behind and a river in front, exposed to all the winds that blew. Stevenson found the view entrancing, because it reminded him of Scotland and especially of the Highlands, though heather and peat smoke were lacking. The accommodation was such as a primitive dwelling on the edge of the wilderness usually provides; but by chance there was a small organ in the parlour, forming, as it were, a link with civilisation. As at Davos, Stevenson was glad to be beyond the rule of Mrs.

Grundy. The few inhabitants, as Mr. Chapman remarks, found him "queer"; but they were not censorious, and he was allowed to go his own way and consult his own tastes with no severer criticism than a stare or a smile.

The glories and genialities of the Indian summer were delightful. But Mrs. Stevenson, well knowing how fleeting they were, visited Montreal, on a return journey from her old home in Indianapolis, and secured the indispensable family furs, with a buffalo coat, astrachan cap, and other necessaries, for Louis. And very soon they were needed. British readers who grumble at the British climate have little conception of the rigors of a North American or Canadian winter. In the northwest I have myself endured a temperature of fifty-eight degrees below zero — that is to say, some ninety degrees of frost. In such a temperature, with the wind blowing unchecked from the ice-fields of the Arctic zone, the sensation is as if an unseen hand were screwing a steel band tighter and ever tighter round the forehead. You freeze without knowing it, till some friendly passer-by accosts you genially with the remark: "Say, I guess your ear (or nose or cheek) is frozen." The remedy is an instant and vigorous rubbing with snow to restore circulation to the affected part; for a neglected frostbite may have grave and frightfully disfiguring consequences.

Saranac in the winter of 1887–1888 had an exceptional spell of cold. Everything froze — water, milk, and even venison in the very process of cooking. One night Stevenson dreamed that a rat bit his ear; he woke to find his ear frostbitten. He complained that the fires radiated no heat, and the experienced Baker warned the family they would be "frizz dead" if they did not block up the chimneys to keep out the piercing, numbing air. Stevenson complained, too, of the expense in a land where it cost five dollars to sneeze, fifty cents to blow your nose, and two dollars and a half to get a small box from the station. Nevertheless, he enjoyed the place, and on the whole benefited in health. He took walks, mostly alone; he skated, sometimes with Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, Mr. S. S. McClure, or other visitor, and took drives in a "buckboard", an exhilarating American invention, and when frost and snow came, in a sleigh. Mr. McClure combined pleasure with business. Perceiving that present reputation gives enhanced value to past work, he arranged to run "The Black Arrow" in his syndicate under the altered title of "The Outlaws of Tunstall Forest"; and he made other arrangements which were at once flattering and helpful to Stevenson.

All the while fresh work went on with surprising energy and regularity. Persistency tells, and Stevenson was heroically persistent. The forenoons he de-

voted to writing in the one tiny sitting-room or parlour, and such was the care not to disturb him that his mother, as she amusingly related, left her bedroom by the window, instead of passing out the natural way through his workroom. From New York he had come with the *Scribner* contract in his pocket for a dozen articles or essays on whatever subjects he pleased; and he set to work on them with consuming zeal. For here was an opportunity which not only meant an assured income for a year, but, sweeter still, perhaps, to preach favourite sermons over again, recast and re-embroidered, to a new and immensely enlarged congregation. To-day dispassionately re-reading the essays in the volume "Across the Plains", one realises afresh the ardour of the preacher, the man with a gospel which he was eager to thrust upon a world by no means hungering for spiritual manna. It is not at all necessary that sermons or homilies on morality should be original; indeed, originality might be a grave defect, since in the nature of things they must deal with facts, experiences, emotions, and aspirations as old and as common as humanity itself. True to this principle, those Saranac essays are rather illustrations of old tradition than new or independent contributions to ethical thought. Here and there we find suggestions of Jeremy Taylor, more of Sir Thomas Browne and his "Urn Burial", big splatches of Hazlitt, with the spirit of Montaigne

regnant. But if the sentiments are largely borrowed, the manner is everywhere typically Stevensonian.

The series opened with the highly fanciful "Chapter on Dreams" and ended with "A Christmas Sermon", itself the theme and inspiration of many another sermon. In view of the events which even then were casting their shadows before, it is worthy of note that Stevenson took the parting word from a "beautiful and manly poem" by Henley. Two of the intermediate essays, "The Lantern-Bearers" and "Pulvis et Umbra", have been much quoted and discussed as shining examples of Stevenson's brave, inspiring philosophy. In the former he draws on the inexhaustible memories of his boyhood by the seashore and the dunes of North Berwick, and, extracting the elements of romance, proceeds to a characteristic fling at peddling realists who would make both life and literature as grey and depressing as their own books. In the second he sets man, "the disease of agglutinated dust", against the awful immensities of the universe, not, however, to emphasise his insignificance (though that is done incidentally), but to prove his amazing courage and light-heartedness in face of a destiny that must overwhelm him in the end: "Poor soul, here for so little, cast among so many hardships, filled with desires so incommensurate and inconsistent, savagely surrounded, savagely descended, irremediably condemned to prey upon his

fellow-lives; who should have blamed him if he had been of a piece with his destiny and a being merely barbarous? And we look and behold him instead filled with imperfect virtues, infinitely childish, often admirably valiant, often touchingly kind; sitting down amidst his momentary life to debate of right and wrong and the attributes of the 'Deity', rising up to do battle for an egg, or die for an idea." That is not wholly borrowed; there is something in it of the real, the inherent Stevenson: for he, more than most, was even then bearing himself valiantly, lightheartedly in face of a darkly menacing fate.

But while he thundered from the pulpit he did not neglect fiction, which was becoming more and more profitable financially and more and more clearly marked as his future vocation. He recalled the germinal idea which came to him among the moors above Pitlochrie, and the scenery around Saranac brought, neither very fortunately nor happily, further suggestions. From such inspiration sprang "The Master of Ballantrae", of which the first part was written in the Baker Cottage. At the same time he was able to revise a boyish story, written, with surprising vigour and fertility of invention, by Mr. Lloyd Osbourne. He thought so well of it that he gladly put his name to it as joint author.

To absorption, lack of business methods, and a bad memory is attributable an incident which, as

he told Henley, made him appear "a kind of unintentional swindler." While in New York he had given Messrs. Scribner "power" over all his works in America. Oblivious of that little fact, he signed a fresh agreement with Mr. McClure. Complications inevitably followed; and, worse still, he felt himself to be guilty of an act which might well be construed as dishonourable. Dismayed and worried, he humbly explained the lapse of memory to Mr. Scribner, begging his forgiveness, and implored Mr. Burlingame to intercede. All's well that ends well. When the circumstances were understood, all differences were adjusted, leaving no shadow of imputation of bad faith on the part of Stevenson. In all such matters, indeed, he was scrupulously honourable, and if he made mistakes it was by pure inadvertence.

### THE RUPTURE WITH HENLEY

During the six months' residence at Saranac there was much to inspirit and inspire. Health was again on the upward curve, power of work was at its highest, and there were exhilarating proofs of increasing popularity. The fighter had at last fairly conquered, established himself triumphantly before all the world. Yet, as by the ancient irony of the immortals, it was in the moment of victory that one of the unhappiest and certainly the most agitating event of his whole life happened — I mean the final

quarrel with W. E. Henley. All the particulars — never hitherto published — are in my possession. It has been stated, with an impressive air of authority, that the rupture came suddenly. That is a misstatement due in part to ignorance, in part to a desire to mystify and create an atmosphere of mystery. There is no mystery. What happened was the natural, it may even be said the inevitable, culmination of much that went before. It was merely one more example of cause and effect. As has been clearly shown in these pages, there had for years been recurrent tiffs, disputes, and even reproaches, sometimes arising out of differences of opinion and sentiment, but in the main from the subtle influences of personal dislikes. And, as so often happens in such matters, a quite trivial incident brought the last shattering explosion. The final cause was merely the match that set off the powder-magazine.

The facts, so far as they need be stated, are briefly these. Mrs. Katherine de Mattos, Stevenson's cousin and an intimate member of Henley's literary entourage, wrote a sort of fairy story in which Henley was deeply interested, for which, indeed, he stood sponsor; but, to his disappointment and hers, it went the round of magazine editors in vain. It had been discussed without reserve while the Stevensons were yet in England; and, after repeated rejections, its author, in effect, remarked to Mrs. Stevenson, "There

it is: I am done with it." The idea had taken Mrs. Stevenson's fancy; and, setting to work, she wrote a new story in which some of the old elements were utilised. It was successful. On its appearance Henley intervened. His letter, marked "Private and confidential", was dated from Norton Place, Chiswick, on March 9, 1888, and began in the old familiar style, "Dear Boy." After jocular references to other matters, "gay, romantic, Bohemian", he remarked that he had read Mrs. Stevenson's story with "considerable amazement", claimed it as "Katherine's", and added he could not understand why there was "not a double signature." He ended with a request that his letter should not be shown "to *anybody*." Stevenson replied instantly to "My dear Henley" in a fury of anger. A grave, an abominable accusation had been made, and the offence was aggravated by a request for secrecy. If the charge had by any chance reached other ears, "a proper explanation and retraction" must be made. For the facts of the case he referred Henley to Mrs. de Mattos, and what she had said in his (Henley's) presence. As he could think of no appropriate ending, he signed his name without greeting of any kind. A second letter written in the same spirit followed immediately on another matter which gave offence. On the 7th of April and the 7th of May Henley wrote again, still to "My dear Lad", saying that he found Stevenson's letter

"heart-breaking", that he really did not know whether to laugh or cry, and that the story had been mentioned casually. He reminded Stevenson, however, that twice before something of the same sort had happened; but protested that for his part the old friendship and affection remained unabated, and begged to be forgiven for what at worst was a mistake of judgment.

Forgiveness did not come, because, as Stevenson noted, while there were expressions of regret there was no retraction. Thereupon he poured out his heart to Charles Baxter in a series of letters which, after all allowances are made, suggest the hysterical outpourings of a fevered, unbalanced brain. He had "forgiven and forgiven, forgotten and forgotten", and yet here he was struck again in an excess of "concocted bitterness." For those who were now assailing him he had done much in many ways, only to be treated with injustice and ingratitude. He complained of persistent unkindnesses which resulted in a serious illness; even the word "treachery" dropped from his embittered pen. Now, under this fresh "staggering attack", he was so wounded and worried he could not sleep except by recourse to opiates, and then only to be haunted by hideous nightmare dreams. His nerves were so shaken that the least cause of excitement — the arrival of a letter, for example — made him tremble "like a reed"; and

in general he was so utterly miserable he wished he had died at Hyères while life still held some spice of happiness.

And there was yet another thorn in his side. Certain works of his, mostly in verse, which he did not wish to see the light, were in Henley's possession. These, for reasons which need not be repeated, he requested should be destroyed, and Henley had ignored the request. There were also numerous references to money, with certain suggestions, of which it need only be said that, in making them, Stevenson did not allow his anger and soreness to mar or obscure his spirit of chivalrous generosity. There were also letters from Mrs. R. L. Stevenson reiterating her husband's statements and sentiments, with an added bitterness which shows how miserable, how savagely resentful she too was.

When the first passionate burst of rage was spent, Stevenson had an uneasy feeling that perhaps he had taken the affair too hotly. In that more human mood, as he called it, he expressed a desire to be scrupulously fair to Henley, and *sub rosa* actually defended him. "Lord, man! I can't help loving the man," he exclaimed after one of his bitterest passages. "I know his merit — damn him!" The change was partly due to the conviction, for which he gave reasons, that Henley was not wholly or even chiefly to blame; that other influences were at work; and

there swelled up in him tender memories of the comrade who had stood so long beside him, and was now, it seemed, forsaking him. But the mischief was done. The old friendship, the old intimacies, were irrevocably riven asunder; and there was nothing for it but to accept the rupture as complete.

In judging these frenzies of the wounded spirit, it should in fairness be borne in mind that Stevenson always wrote to Baxter with absolute unreserve. Except, possibly, Mr. Colvin (who was kept out of the Henley quarrel), Baxter was now his oldest friend, and there were circumstances which made the intimacy peculiarly close. The letters abound in expressions of confidence and affection; and there are touching references to the vanished time when the two were "heartless young dogs" haunting the taverns of Edinburgh together. Now in his confusion and distress he turned, like a stricken child, to the companion of his youth who knew him so well and was ever so ready with sympathy and help. He was unutterably sore and depressed — sore because of what he felt to be a false and cruel charge; depressed because of the tragic severance from one who had been his boon associate in so many trials and adventures, and who, despite everything, still held a deep place in his affection. "To be wroth with one we love doth work like madness in the brain." It was so with Stevenson. In such moods we are all

apt to exaggerate; and if we are blessed (or cursed) with sensibility, passion, imagination, and the gift of expression, our madness is not unlikely to run away with us. One thing is certain, that the parting with Henley caused Stevenson the most poignant distress. Another thing is equally certain, that the parting was the result of no sudden explosion or fit of temper, but of a long sequence of antecedent events. Such are the facts briefly and impartially presented. Upon the issues involved judgment may be left to the impartial reader.

Towards the end of March, the 26th, to be exact, Mrs. R. L. Stevenson left Saranac for San Francisco (whence her letters relating to the Henley quarrel are dated), and on the 16th of April the other members of the family followed to New York. There they stayed at their old quarters, the Hotel St. Stephens, East Eleventh Street. Again Stevenson found gratifying proofs of appreciation and popularity. Admirers called in a steady stream, many of them carrying gifts of costly flowers, which (the recipient being generally in bed) turned his bedroom into a miniature conservatory. But he was also "out and about" more than formerly. One memorable experience just then was a talk of several hours on a bench in Washington Square with Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens), for whose adventure stories he professed an envious admiration. Never a city bird,

however, he soon grew tired of New York, and there were circumstances, of which his friends knew nothing, to make him restless. At the suggestion of Mr. Low the party left on April 30 for Monasquan, the well-known New Jersey resort, where they stayed for the month of May at the Union Boarding House.

All through that time Stevenson seemed the very incarnation of high spirits. Success, long delayed, had come with a rush, and he appeared to be enjoying it with a gleeful exuberance that was not merely boyish, but impish. His talk, his movements, his whole bearing, had the exhilaration of victory. With Mark Twain he discussed "Huckleberry Finn" and the art of comic adventure as if he had no other thought; with equal zest he helped young Lloyd Osbourne to sail a catboat at Monasquan, and delighted Mr. Low, St. Gaudens, and other visitors with the overflowing vivacity of his talk. To correspondents in Britain, too, other than Charles Baxter, he wrote in a vein of abounding gaiety and buoyancy. Yet all the while he was as one living and moving in a nightmare which made life a terror and a misery. Do what he would, it was impossible to get rid of that haunting shadow which turned everything black. In sunlight and in contact with others he might, by an effort of will, disregard it and appear to be at ease; but in the watches of the night, when terrors enlarge themselves spectrally, it came back

like an evil spirit to darken and torment. Long before, Henley detected in him much of Hamlet. Now he was all Hamlet with his "To be or not to be."

To die, to sleep! No more, and by a sleep to say
We end the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.

It was a consummation then very suggestively present to Stevenson's mind. "This business," he told Baxter, "is my head-stone."

The series of letters began at Saranac and continued from New York and Monasquan. On May 21 his mother noted in her diary that "Louis gets some worrying letters, which upset and depress him very much", but gave no clue to their contents. His desire now was to get away to sea. Letters could not follow him there and the evil spell might be broken. The idea of a cruise among South Sea Islands had already been discussed at Saranac, and Mr. McClure, with a shrewd eye to business, was eager to have a series of descriptive articles by Stevenson for his newspaper syndicate, the price to be $10,000. There were financial difficulties, however. But Stevenson was so depressed, so sick at heart and miserable, that he must get off somewhere at once or die.

Meanwhile, in San Francisco, Mrs. Stevenson was actively making inquiries, and one day there came a thrilling telegram stating that for $750 a month she

could secure a yacht which could be ready for sea in ten days. "Take it," replied Stevenson, "and expect us in ten days." The yacht was the *Casco*, seventy-four tons register, the first to be chartered on several such adventures. To obviate delay, funds were obtained from Edinburgh, supplemented, I understand, by an advance from Mr. McClure in part payment of the forthcoming articles. Upon his father's death Stevenson was entitled to a sum of £3,000. Two thirds of that sum he drew, explaining to Charles Baxter, who now had charge of his affairs, that he reckoned the amount would be sufficient to carry him over seven months. If the McClure proposals materialised satisfactorily, he hoped the proceeds would replace the spent capital. Moreover, he hoped to finish "The Master of Ballantrae" in six weeks on shipboard, and there were other projects in prospect. If his scheme failed, then the £2,000 would be gone; that was all.

For himself he scarcely cared what happened. Probably it would be best if the *Casco* went down with him; only there were others to be considered. With the dream of a lifetime realised in the forthcoming cruise, he could not help repeating, "Would to God I had died at Hyères!" Such was the mood in which he prepared for his long-planned, much-dreamed-of adventure among the enchantments of the tropics. Generally he is represented as embark-

ing on the *Casco* in a bounding exhilaration of spirits. To give any such impression is utterly untrue to fact. The naked truth is that he was in the depths of a despondency which not merely robbed life of warmth and colour and incentive, but killed hope itself. Yet, in justice to all concerned, it must be put on record that even then he paid an eloquent tribute to the chivalry, loyalty, and rich temperament of Henley. The loyalty, alas! had gone awry; but deep down the old appreciation, the old intense fellow-feeling remained.

### WHO WAS TO BLAME?

Henley, on his part, gave little or no sign. As all the world knows, he later wrote an article which has been denounced as a wanton attack on the memory of a dead comrade. Perhaps he had been wiser to consume his own smoke in silence. Anger, though a gift of the gods and an attribute of all great and good men, is not always in season, or always appropriate. As the wise man long ago divined, there is a time to be angry and a time to forbear being angry. Forbearance, however, was never Henley's ruling virtue. He was intolerant of humbug, of falsehood, and especially of fatuity run mad. In the case of Stevenson he tried to introduce some leaven of sanity and common sense into what he conceived to be a fatuously engineered campaign of canonisation; and the idola-

ters turned on him savagely—as their way is. He was jealous, vindictive, churlish, and could not bear to see his old companion of Grub Street as the triumphant writer, adored and caressed by a world of worshippers.

The charge is ridiculously untrue. During his later time in and around London it was my privilege to know Henley with some intimacy. I retain grateful memories of his generosity, his readiness to recognise and aid a beginner. I have scores of letters from him too, some mere hurried notes, others long and intimate, discussing and criticising all manner of men and subjects. They contain many pungent passages: he could not help being pungent; but of meanness, jealousy, or rancour there is neither trace nor suggestion. Of the early Stevenson, the gay and gallant soldier of fortune by whose side he had fought, he always spoke with admiration and affection; the later Stevenson, canonised, all but deified, he refused to recognise as the man he once knew so closely.

It happened, moreover, that I was in touch with him when he was actually engaged in writing the peccant article which appeared in the *Pall Mall Magazine* for December, 1901. Ostensibly a review of a book, it is in reality a character sketch done with the pen of a Tacitus. Partisans with a case to make seized upon it as a piece of spiteful depreciation done in a fit of ghoulish exultation, a passion of revenge that glutted itself by dancing like a savage

on the corpse of a fallen enemy. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In writing his article, Henley was in fact lacerating his own heart. His first resolution was to remain silent, to let the shouting and the rioting of sentimental or ignorant adulation pass unnoticed. But, as the one competent man alive who knew Stevenson to the core, he was urged to write, and after much dubitation he consented. Being what he was, he told the truth as he knew it, or as much of the truth as could be put into a magazine article. Read dispassionately to-day, his paper will be found, not an aspersion on Stevenson, but a protest against the fatuity of those who would make him out a "seraph in chocolate" and crown him with the halo of infallibility.

Let it be said once for all that it was not Stevenson's glittering success which provoked Henley's scorn; for to that success he had himself materially contributed. Nor was it the vaunted friendship with barbaric kings or the much-advertised retinue and sultan-like splendour of Vailima. Such a spirit would deserve nothing but contempt, and Henley was never contemptible. Stevenson might be rich and great and glorious, and Henley would have hurrahed and thrown his cap in the air with the rest. But he could not obliterate memories of the past or the knowledge of what had been. And, remembering, he refused to accept as genuine the celestial figure now presented

for his adoration — a figure radiant as a young god, whose feet had never touched mire, whose dazzling robes of purest glory were never sullied by any human frailty, any stain of human grossness or folly. Hyperion for a satyr! It was too much. He revolted, not against his old comrade, not against the Stevenson he "knew and loved", but against the grotesque apotheosis, the attempt to foist on the public imagination a paragon of flawless beauty and immaculate virtue.

There was another thing. In some quarters Stevenson was posed as the benevolent patron, the shining, beneficent Apollo graciously condescending upon a maimed and stricken man whom he had picked up in an Edinburgh hospital and who lacked the grace to be grateful for benefits bestowed. Henley resented the imputation, as any man of spirit would. I say so much because it chances that I know something of Henley's state of mind and the circumstances in which his article was written. Unhappily it was his farewell. He hoped to return to the subject, when a fuller statement would have brought out what it has remained for me to tell. But the infirmities of premature old age were upon him; the end was near, and he died leaving much unsaid.

## FLEEING FROM SPECTRES

On May 28, Stevenson, with his mother, Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, and Valentine Roch, returned to

New York, meaning to proceed at once across-continent to California. But Louis caught cold, and the start was delayed till June 2. The journey this time was not by emigrant train in the company of brutally unsympathetic men, but by *train de luxe*, at any rate as far as Chicago. At Sacramento Mrs. R. L. Stevenson met the party, and on the 7th they reached San Francisco. Thoughts of the past swept back upon Stevenson. The blackest days of his life were passed in that gay, bustling, flamboyant metropolis of the West. Amid her plenty, her riot of luxuries, he had starved; amid her whirling pleasures he had been lonely, miserable, sick to the point of death. The best he could afford was a wretched room in Bush Street, with the husks of the stranded prodigal son for fare. Two ounces of food a day and such comfort as the destitute know — that had been his lot then. Now it was the elegance and rich fare of the Occidental Hotel, in Montgomery Street, one of the best in the city.[1]

And he came, a famous man, to take possession of a rich man's pleasure yacht. It was a romantic and dramatic change; yet he had little enough heart to enjoy his shining fortune. For he was still wrapped in that black, cold, desolating cloud which his bosom friend had, as he thought, cruelly flung about him. Moreover, his wife's sentiments, a perplexing mix-

[1] Burned down in the great fire that followed the earthquake of 1906.

ture of fury and despair, did not tend to tranquillity. He spent much of his time in bed, not caring to go round the city. But he took his mother to see his old quarters in Bush Street, only to find that both the house and the landlady, Mrs. Carson, were gone. She was discovered, however, and met her old lodger at his hotel, with what thoughts may be imagined.

The owner of the *Casco* was Doctor Merrit, of Oakland, reputedly a millionaire, who had fitted her out for his own pleasure with costly magnificence of polished upholstery, silks, velvets, Brussels carpets, and a wealth of gleaming metal. The report had reached him that Stevenson was "a long-haired crank", and, disliking the whole species, he wished to have the bargain "called off." But an interview at the Occidental brought a change of mind, and the transaction was carried out as originally agreed. A trusted skipper, Captain Otis, who began with a similar prejudice, was engaged, to become, as it turned out, friend as well as skipper, and later to figure as Nare in "The Wrecker." The crew consisted of four men — three Swedes and a Finn — with a Chinaman as supernumerary. Stevenson found a certain pleasurable excitement in ordering stores and visiting the *Casco* to superintend preparations. For the sake of fresh air he sometimes slept on the yacht, and on the 20th the whole party went on board. By the 26th all was shipshape. On the 27th the

*Casco* was towed across the bay from Oakland to the North Beach under Telegraph Hill, where she anchored for the night. Next morning, the 28th, with the first streak of dawn, towed by the tug *Pelican*, she passed outward bound through the Golden Gate, bearing Robert Louis Stevenson for ever from all the lands he knew.

# CHAPTER V

## ULYSSES

STEVENSON was much at home on the sea. The brine, as he said, was in his blood, a heritage from the Broughty Ferry skipper and the lighthouse-builders who had braved the fury of the elements on many a perilous coast. He loved adventure as they loved it, as the enterprising French *émigré* must have loved it, as John Blair of Ardblair loved it when he sought out his enemy to take vengeance even in the kirk on Sunday. And here was adventure, spiced with romance, of the most enchanting kind. It was a joy, therefore, to be afloat; and in a very particular sense it was a relief as well. For on stepping aboard the *Casco* he was as one fleeing from spectres. Here, beyond reach of "man's inhumanity to man", his perturbed spirit might find some measure of forgetfulness and peace. The sea, in fact, was his only hope of regaining self-possession, escaping from the torments which he could not shake off on land. And by degrees they faded into the background of memory. Not that he forgot those terrible letters from Chiswick or the emotional havoc they wrought. But as

the *Casco* spread her white wings to the favouring wind and bore him nearer and nearer the tropic isles of his boyish dreams, he thought less and less of the past and more and more of the future.

The present, too, had its vivid interests despite the monotony of life on shipboard. There was the diversion of watching the pilot birds and boatswain birds, flying fish and stray whales. It was exciting also to catch the first glimpse of the Southern Cross hung aloft the night like a glittering beacon. "Nothing," says the great Humboldt, "awakens in the traveller a livelier remembrance of the immense distance by which he is separated from his country than the aspect of an unknown firmament," and the passing from one hemisphere to another. And for the man accustomed to northern latitudes, to the clammy haars and piercing east winds of Edinburgh, to the snows of Switzerland and of Saranac, it was a delicious novelty to divest himself of all save shirt and trousers and tramp the warm deck with bare feet.

Progress was, of course, erratic. There were long calms when the *Casco*, a speck on an illimitable glassy expanse, lay as idly as "a painted ship upon a painted ocean." At other times there were gales when she danced giddily and raced under bare poles or with half her canvas set. She was a clean, swift craft, in reality built for racing, and occasionally swam too much with her "lee rail in the sea" for

amateur sailors. But Captain Otis knew her qualities, knew how after every toss and plunge she would rise, cresting the waves lightly as a sea-bird and shaking the water from her gleaming sides as in sheer glee. Stevenson worked little; for once he was not in the working vein; but he had books, "The Woodlanders" among them, and in the intervals of knitting his mother read Gibbon's "Decline and Fall" aloud.

Once out of the doldrums and into the trade-winds the *Casco* sped at a spanking pace, under a burning sky by day and the gorgeous southern stars by night. Stevenson often stood on deck gazing at them raptly, with thoughts of their everlasting duration and his own fleeting insignificance. Something of the feeling which he attributes to the Princess in "Otto" in her forest flight took possession of him. A great peace seemed to bathe his soul. That quarrel with Henley which had caused him so much misery, what did it matter? Both Henley and he would so soon cease to be, while those "patens of bright gold" would shine on for generation after generation of gazers. He remembered the philosophy of his favourite Marcus Aurelius, and for a little while at least was at peace.

Early on the morning of July 20 he roused the company with the excited and exciting cry of "land." Two clouds were dimly visible on the horizon; Hunhauna and Nukahiva; and by evening the *Casco* was

swinging at anchor in the Bay of Anaho, off the latter island. He was in the region of a new kind of romance; for this was the scene, or part of the scene, of Herman Melville's entrancing South Sea story, "Typee." A German named Regler, the only white man on the island, immediately went on board the *Casco* with courteous offers of help, and took the captain off in a native canoe to secure supplies of fresh food — milk, chickens, fruit, to which later was added "deliciously" tender pork. The young chief, Taipi-Kikino, also welcomed the strangers; he was extremely handsome and proved very agreeable, laughed good-humouredly at everything, and, remembering (for he was not without some tincture of culture) that handshaking was a civilised custom, punctiliously shook hands with each member of the party. Doubtless he understood the value of first impressions.

The effect on Stevenson of that first contact with picturesque heathendom is described with his customary gusto in the opening chapter of "In the South Seas." To Mr. Colvin he complained humourously that it was "all a swindle." He had come so far to see the noble savage in his noble, savage state; and, lo! a population "more civilised than we." One example of civilised ways came pertinently home. With an up-to-date eye to business, natives crowded round the *Casco* to sell bananas, oranges, and other

wares. The strangers shook their heads over the prices asked, whereupon one of the vendors, with a refined, smiling sarcasm worthy of the most highly bred cynic, remarked that the *Casco* was a very fine ship, but it was a pity she had so little money on board. Could London or Paris have done better?

Until a date little anterior to 1888, the highly civilised population of Nukahiva had observed the rites of cannibalism as part of the routine of life, and it was suspected had still a lingering fondness for "long pig" on the sly. One celebrated visitor, Kooamua, a sort of Polynesian Rob Roy, greatly took Stevenson's fancy. He was now a model of respectability, living a hale, influential old age in a European house, where from time to time he entertained the French Governor in regal style. Yet not many years earlier this "amiable old gentleman", with the soft, almost cooing manner, "ate his enemies as he walked home from killing 'em" and gloried in the exhibition. "So does Kooamua to his enemies!" he would cry exultantly as he strode, gory and ferocious, along the beach at Anaho, alternately flourishing and munching a dead man's arm. In his later regenerate state Stevenson described him as a "perfect gentleman."

Once Newman eloquently defined the attributes which might entitle one to that high distinction. It would have been a nice question for that accomplished

casuist whether a man who kills and eats his neighbour as though he were lawful game may still deserve the title of gentleman. Perhaps it is no more a transgression of the laws of humanity to pot a fellow-man than is the manly, womanly sport of hunting a tame deer till it drops, and then exult as it is torn to pieces by dogs. Stevenson, at any rate, was charmed. The ex-cannibal, who probably could not help looking with fond eyes on the young and plump, was delightfully amiable and polite. No doubt the strange white man was safe; the least-discriminating cannibal would have turned from the lean, cadaverous, juiceless Stevenson with disdain.

Under the firm rule of France cannibalism had gone out of fashion. Moreover, French priests came with the ameliorating influences of the Church; and although they complained that the islanders had no spiritual life, the outward amenities of civilisation were meticulously observed. Like nearly all primitive peoples, they were sociable and hospitable. They gave native dances in honour of the white visitors, carried gifts of flowers and fruit to the *Casco*, and were filled with childish glee on getting ship's biscuits, jam, and bits of ribbon in return. There came, too, the exciting throb of the war-drum; for at Raiata (Society Islands) there was red rebellion and the chiefs were holding councils of war. It was Stevenson's first taste of Polynesian politics, which

later absorbed so much of his time and energy, with dubious advantage to his reputation.

Three weeks the party remained at Anaho, enjoying a delectable hospitality, revelling in sunshine, bathing, gathering shells, and studying a new race. Then they sailed round to Taiohae, on the southern side, where Stevenson made his first acquaintance with missionaries. But the real interest lay in ceremonial visits to and by the celebrated cannibal Queen Vaekehu, a singular personality, of whom Stevenson has left a vivid picture. Tattooed from head to foot, she was "perhaps the greatest masterpiece of that art" then extant. The Roman Catholic bishop, Dordillon, noted in those parts for his zeal and humanity, sought her out and by the arts of Mother Church induced her to enter the fold. But prior to conversion, with its subsequent primness, "her leg was one of the sights of Taiohae." Few ladies of any age or clime ever crowded into a single life more high romance, more thrilling adventure. In her youth she had been a beauty and she had been important. Renowned warriors fought for her, as so many centuries before they fought for Helen of Troy; and, more or less like the ineffable Helen, she was passed from husband to husband, or captor to captor, as chance and the fortune of battle befell.

Moreover, in that gay old time she had looked with relish on cannibal orgies; indeed, the strong

white teeth were often red with the blood of men. Now she lived primly in a neat wooden house, and received visitors, European fashion, with more than European politeness. Stevenson wondered, as well he might, whether in the peace and piety of the new life she ever "regretted and aspired after" the old, with its stir and colour. Questioned on the subject, her son, Stenilas, replied succinctly, "Ah! She is religious." The provident bishop may have provided safeguards for conscience (supposing that troublesome monitor to have existed); at any rate, there was no sign that the devout convert was ever haunted by the ghosts of those on whom she had feasted, or that her appetite was at all impaired by remorse. Stevenson was immensely impressed. It was weirdly strange to sit at table with a lady who had once, so to speak, kept "cold missionary on the sideboard." He may have shuddered, but he could not help being interested.

A month the novel hospitalities and felicities of Nukahiva lasted. Then early on the morning of August 22 the *Casco* put to sea again, carrying a new mate who was acquainted with those treacherous waters to act as pilot. The next objective was Tahiti; but Stevenson, who ever found the lure of adventure irresistible, insisted that the course should be set through the dangerous channel of the Bordelais Straits for Hiva-oa; and after some thirty-six hours

of risky sailing they put into Taahauka, the so-called port of that lonely and depopulated island. There a stay of ten days sufficed.

By September 4 they were off again, this time for Fakarava, which was reached on the 9th after a "very difficult and dangerous" passage among the coral reefs of the Paumotus Archipelago, reefs which might at any moment rip open the fragile shell of the *Casco*. The British reader may have some faint idea of the peril by picturing a strange ship among the jagged rocks off the coast of the Channel Islands, in the neighbourhood of the Casquets and Jersey, with little guidance from maps and no lighthouses to flash a warning. The currents, too, were strong and unknown. Indeed, when land was sighted after leaving Taahauku, it was found that bearings had been lost; and the *Casco* had to lie to within sight and sound of breakers, which, had she run on in the dark, would have splintered her to matchwood. Next day, however, she was safely in the lagoon which serves as harbour for Fakarava. There a stay of three weeks was made, Stevenson and his wife occupying a small house in a cluster of palms.

Stevenson found the interest of the new scenes "incredible"; he had never dreamed, he told Mr. Colvin, there were "such places and such races." In the same letter he sent love to Henry James, Henley, and other old friends. The thought of Henley still

haunted him. Even the magic of tropic isles, corals, palms, sunshine, and primitive races could not banish or obliterate it. Early in October they reached Papeete, the capital of the Society Islands, and again Stevenson was charmed. The climate of Tahiti, he found, was the climate of Paradise. But his joy was short-lived. At Fakarava he caught cold, and then alarming symptoms developed. Thinking Papeete did not suit him, he ordered the *Casco* to be taken round to Taravao, on the south side of the island, and in the short passage was nearly wrecked. It was useless. The cold became a fever, and the fever speedily declared itself as congestion of the lungs. He was on the verge of collapse, with no medical aid available. If he were not to die in that lonely spot, something must be done, and at once. But what?

## DUSKY ROYALTIES

With the energy and practical ability which always distinguished her in an emergency, his wife went ashore to seek help, and after frantic searching found a Chinaman who owned a wagon and a pair of horses. She instantly engaged them; and Stevenson was taken to Tautira, a village sixteen miles distant, over roads which, in a springless vehicle, caused him excruciating torture. There, with some difficulty and at an exorbitant rent, a house was procured and he was put to bed in a state of collapse. But the good fairy of

romance was still with him. Hearing that a sick white man had arrived in the village, the ex-Queen of Raiatea, Princess Moë, hastened to him, saw his danger, and did what she could for him with raw fish salads and other dainties. According to Mrs. Stevenson, she saved his life. Her goodness and his gratitude are celebrated in the graceful poem, "To an Island Princess." Something magical had happened. He lay in a stupor, opened his eyes, and behold there —

> Generous and helpful, wise and good
> The Princess Fairy Moë stood.[1]

Nor was the beneficent fairy content merely to be physician and nurse to the interesting invalid, she must provide him with fit lodging as well. Though her regal state was no more, she still retained rights of lordship over the persons and property of others, among them a petty chief, Ori-a-Ori, a clan name which must have transported Stevenson back to the Highlands and Highland history. In the exercise of her rights the Princess commandeered the chief's quarters and there installed Stevenson and his party as her guests, a hospitable patriarchal proceeding suggestive of Biblical usage. In that delightful retreat, under the care of "a beautiful brown princess", Stevenson quickly regained strength.

[1] To goodness and generosity the Princess Moë added a charming personality. It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader that she is immortalised in the pages of Pierre Loti.

He found Tautira an "earthly heaven", but a heaven, alas! tainted by the intrusion of a sordid outer world. The old problems of finance were much with him. At Tautira there were no letters and no accounts to disturb him; but on reaching Honolulu he expected a home mail and "a devil of an awakening." Meanwhile, however, as he informed his agent, Charles Baxter, he dreamed luxuriously "in the full lustre of millions." The people took him to be the "richest son of man" who ever visited Tautira; and, true to his own creed of happiness, he revelled in the novel, delicious sensation of passing as a millionaire. A debtor's jail, as he humorously suggested, lay ahead; but in the meantime it was great fun to have the reputation of unbounded riches.

Once more, through Baxter, he sent a message to W. E. Henley. He played the flageolet for the entertainment of Ori, talked of Henley's musical accomplishments, and he wished Henley to know. Those repeated messages to his old unforgettable comrade have an infinite pathos. Chiswick was more than ten thousand miles away; the past was gone; the old friendship severed for ever. Moreover, the new life was full of novelty, adventure, and romance, to absorb and uplift. On every hand new scenes, new peoples, new manners and customs engaged his attention. Yet he could not get away from the quarrel with Henley and its consequences. While he studied

picturesque natives in their primal simplicity; while he listened to the booming of surf on coral reefs and took shelter from a blazing sun in the thick shade of palms; while he gazed at the nightly miracle of the southern sky; ay, and even while he was seemingly engrossed with his beautiful brown princess, his thoughts were back in a small house at Chiswick with the man of all men who knew him best. Fifteen years earlier he vaunted himself on an easy indifference to the sentiments and feelings of others; but he found it impossible to be indifferent now. It is not too much to say that the vision of Henley's averted face in the far North poisoned all the joys of the odorous, gorgeous, seductive South.

It added to his unhappiness, his brooding misery, that from those about him he had to conceal his black mood. To have secrets which dare not be imparted is to nurse a scorpion in the breast. Stevenson suffered, smiled, and held his peace. For merely to mention Henley to his wife would be to pile fat on a smouldering fire. She hated Henley and all his circle with an intensity of hatred which, on the slightest chance remark, blazed into a fury of malediction. In temperament husband and wife were poles apart. Throughout his whole strange life Stevenson, so far as I can discover, was not guilty of a single act of vindictiveness. In his queer, complex composition there was not an atom of the cad.

Though so often strangely overlaid, chivalry was a basic quality of his character; often he was quixotically generous; and for Henley he certainly harboured no vengeful feelings. But he had learned the value and the convenience of judicious silence. There are occasions when the line of least resistance is the best policy.

At Tautira, therefore, he gave himself, heart and soul, as appeared, to the enjoyment of his privileges as the guest of royalty and the novel experiences of a life little trammelled by the forms and insincerities of civilisation. He took pains to be captivating, and was triumphantly successful. Charmed with her white protégé, the Princess Moë made his pleasure her own particular care. For his entertainment she organised native dances and exhibitions of native song; and, like the gallant cavalier poet he was, he repaid her handsomely in verse which she cherished with adoration. Ori-a-Ori, a handsome, gigantic, yellow-haired heathen with a laugh that might have resounded straight from the pages of the Iliad, was equally enchanted. He heard of Henley's skill as a musician, and was moved to envy. More entrancing still were the mutual recitals of folk-lore and clan history. Stevenson captivated Ori with rousing tales of Highland clansmen and their feats of valour; and in return Ori told no less rousing tales of island bravery, tales which were often mere variants of

Northern sagas, so similar is human nature and human experience the wide world over. In that pleasant manner of give and take Stevenson got much valuable "copy" for his book on the South Seas.

The habit of work, temporarily in abeyance, returned and he took up "The Master of Ballantrae", adding several chapters; but conditions were not favourable for the concentration essential in creative work, and again it was laid aside. Turning to verse as an easier exercise, he wrote the ballad "The Feast of Famine", and most of "The Song of Rohero", both vigorous pieces of narrative, but scarcely distinguished by high poetic quality. Thus, with little work and much play, nine weeks passed like an exquisite dream of Eden realised. But the time for moving on came; and the *Casco*, which had remained at Taravao for repairs, was brought round (nearly foundering in a gale) to take the party on board.

Then an event happened which Thomas Stevenson would certainly have taken as a direct intervention of Providence. In appreciation of kindnesses received, the elder Mrs. Stevenson entertained a company of some thirty women and a few children on the yacht. The entertainment ended, and speeches and compliments made, an aged woman of the party prayed for the safety of the ship and all she carried. In particular she prayed that, if there were any defects in the vessel, they might be discovered before

she put to sea or ran into danger. When the visitors were gone, Captain Otis, sailor-fashion, appears to have made a contemptuous reference to "praying, psalm-singing natives" and their absurd petitions. The *Casco*, the beautiful silver ship, as her wealth of glittering metal led admiring natives at Fakarava to call her, was sound in every timber and perfectly seaworthy. To prove his words he tested the mainmast, and lo! to his horror and dismay, it was crumbling in the last stages of dry rot. It had, in fact, been unsafe throughout the whole voyage from San Francisco, and the miracle was that it had not long ago gone by the board in a gale.

Immediate departure was now impossible. The *Casco* must be refitted; and under reefed mainsail she was with some difficulty taken to Papeete. New spars being unprocurable, the old ones were patched up. But there were unforeseen delays; stormy weather set in and communication between Papeete and Tautira was cut off. Meanwhile a critical situation developed for the stranded travellers. The *Casco* became due, overdue, and did not return. The stores of food, landed for a brief residence, ran short; worse still, funds gave out. Day followed day in anxious watching, and still the *Casco* did not appear. Pleasure gave place to anxiety; anxiety to despair. The trim little craft must have gone down, and they were marooned. It was very short short-commons, or the

charity of Ori-a-Ori. Stevenson, despite his studied blitheness, looked troubled; his wife was in tears; the rest of the company managed their feelings as they could. Ori-a-Ori saw, understood, and generously stepped into the breach.

"My brother," he said to Stevenson, "why be troubled? Is not all I have thine?" Nor was he content with mere hospitality. Against all advice and persuasion, he went off with four of his young men in a crazy boat, half canoe, half whaler, got somehow to Papeete, and brought back news of the *Casco*, with supplies of food and money. To celebrate deliverance, a great feast followed at which Ori-a-Ori got merry on champagne, jubilantly declaring it to be the drink of kings. Learning its cost, however, he was cured of any further desire for indulgence.

### HOMESICKNESS

To Stevenson the period of waiting was acutely trying. Restless, impatient, and secretly gloomy, his thoughts took a backward turn, bringing a sharp attack of homesickness. Tautira might be heaven; the South Sea breezes might be fragrant and warm; but he longed for the whistle of the wind off the Pentlands or Arthur's Seat, the splash of spring rain in Princes Street, or even a whiff of the murky atmosphere of the High Street or the Grass Market.

"How often and willingly," he wrote a little while before, "do I not look again in fancy on Tummel or Manor or the talking Airdle or Dee swirling in its lynn; on the bright burn of Kinnaird or the golden burn that pours and sulks in the den behind Kingussie." He saw them all and more in fancy now. And what was he in this far Paradise of the South? A passing exile, a wanderer without a home. The tune and words of "Wandering Willie" ran hauntingly in his head:

> Here awa', there awa', Wandering Willie.
> Here awa', there awa', haud awa' hame.

Ah! if only his exiled heart could "haud awa' hame!" In forlorn mood he wrote to the old Scots tune the pathetic verses, characteristically enclosed in a jesting letter to Charles Baxter, beginning —

> Home no more home to me, whither must I wander?

His body was held prisoner in Tahiti; but his unfettered spirit was back with kindly familiar folk among the moorlands and by the rushing rivers of the North. Then, in fact, began the backward yearning which increased in pathos and intensity to the end.

The *Casco* came at last, gifts were exchanged with the hospitable Ori and others, according to Tahitian custom, and farewells taken; and early on the afternoon of Tuesday, December 25, 1888, sail was hoisted and the course set for Honolulu, which was reached

on January 24, after a "deplorable passage" of squalls and calms. So long was the party overdue that they had been given up for lost by Mrs. Strong, Stevenson's stepdaughter, then resident in Honolulu. There the *Casco* was paid off with much regret and sent back to her owner in Oakland, leaving behind her a taste for the sea, primitive peoples, and sun-drenched islands.

### A POTENTIAL MASTERPIECE

But the need of getting to work immediately was imperative. In the preceding November "The Master of Ballantrae" began serially in *Scribner's Magazine*, and as yet was little more than half done. Stevenson had therefore to face the problem, familiar enough to novelists, of providing "copy" with the printer in hot pursuit. If he broke down, if invention failed, as at the critical moment it was so apt to fail, then there would be trouble in New York, with consequent disaster to delicately balanced finances. For greater quiet and convenience he went out to Waikiki, a small resort three and a half miles along the coast, with shady gardens, a long curving beach of purest sand, and pellucid emerald waters that were a perpetual invitation to bathe. There he rented a cottage of the bungalow type, landed his shells, savage weapons, and other bric-a-brac picked up among the islands, and sat down in earnest to finish "The

Master of Ballantrae." In his progress as a novelist the story marks a great and striking advance. "Treasure Island" was at best a book for boys; "Kidnapped", though a more deliberate and serious effort, was yet another boy's story; "Prince Otto" was little more than an exquisite and very self-conscious exercise in style; "Jekyll and Hyde" was a piece of drugged morality, hastily thrown off for the sake of the cash it brought. But "The Master of Ballantrae" (in strict accuracy "The Master of Durisdeer") was a strenuous effort in the novelist's art. All its author's preceding work had been in a sense experimental; here for the first time he was grappling with the complexities, the ironies, the tragedies of real life.

It is an attempt to render human experience on a large and impressive scale, and up to a point it succeeds. The opening, powerfully conceived and powerfully executed, strikes a note which, had it been maintained, might have resulted in a genuine masterpiece, something, perhaps, not unworthy of the hand that gave us "The Bride of Lammermoor." The atmosphere is excellently, convincingly created; the characters — the old lord, the master, his brother, his brother's wife, Mackellar, and the rest — are infused with the breath of life; that is, they are individual, vital, alive. Some of the scenes, too, notably the duel, are extraordinarily vivid. Any novelist will

immediately perceive that in those early chapters written at Saranac Stevenson worked in a glow of genuine creation. His imagination had seized its material and was working with ease and power. True, the style retains something of early conceits and preciosity, something of affected quaintness. Thus, when Mackellar carries the candles into the still, black night he remarks, "My teeth smote each other in my mouth." It would not do to say they chattered in fear. Again, in describing the dead stillness, he tells us that "a windless stricture of frost had bound the air", a piece of affectation of which Mr. Mackellar, left to himself, would never have been guilty. Stevenson, in fact, had not yet shaken off "the sedulous ape", the desire to achieve a sort of bastard originality. But in the first half such lapses are few and insignificant. "The thought constructs the tune" successfully and for the most part harmoniously. As he proceeded, however, or rather as he took up the tale again in Tahiti and Honolulu, there set in a sad decline. Imagination flagged and lost grip, invention became confused, and the story tails off into episodic lameness.

One significant circumstance partially explains the descent. In his youth Stevenson had heard from an uncle, John Balfour, an ex-Indian official, a grotesque story of a "buried and resuscitated fakir." Unhappily, in planning the conclusion of his own story, he

remembered the absurd fakir, and decided to transplant him from India to the frozen wilderness of the Adirondacks. A surer creative instinct would have rejected the idea. But Stevenson, who was often at a loss to carry on, evidently fancied so weird a character would give his flagging story a fresh impetus. Accordingly Secundra Das enters, and both in interest as in art the novel goes to pieces. In the end "The Master of Ballantrae" fails from weakness, bodily and creative. Nevertheless, it contains scenes and situations of impressive power and beauty. The "damned ending" greatly troubled Stevenson, because it was written mechanically on a bad plan. All the same, as he informed his editor, he considered the book "first chop, sir, first chop." And at the point in his career then reached he was indubitably right. On the ultimate roll of his works it stands only a little lower than "Weir of Hermiston."

By May it was at last finished, leaving him in a stupor of exhaustion, a feeling not unfamiliar to novelists. Besides, his financial worries pursued him. In January, as he reported to Burlingame, he was "quite penniless"; a month later he was in the same doleful condition, with rapidly mounting expenses and uncertain liabilities. March brought temporary relief, and more money followed in May. The result was that in June Wandering Willie would go home. Home in June! That intoxicating thought made his

heart leap and his blood race. Coral islands were lovely, romantic, enchanting; tropical flowers gorgeous; tropical seas lucent and alluring; but oh! for the simple yellow broom, the purple heather, and the grey links of Forth. To be sure, permanent residence in Britain was now out of the question. But why not Madeira? In Madeira, with its delightful climate, its variegated and beautiful scenery, he might reasonably count on faring well. And it was "only a week" from England — was, so to speak, within hailing distance, or at any rate within visiting distance, of his friends. They could go to him and in summer he could go to them.

But before March was out he was planning another cruise among yet other Pacific Islands. Even Honolulu was proving too cold. Besides, having seen so much of the South Seas, he desired to see more. The home-going would therefore be postponed for a year, but not a day longer. As we know, it was postponed for ever. Meanwhile he not only got "The Master of Ballantrae" out of hand, but helped Mr. Lloyd Osbourne with "The Wrong Box", first called "The Game of Bluff." This was offered serially to Mr. McClure for $5,000 (£1,000) cash down, but the offer was declined. Refusal, however, did not damp his ardour for the story. "If it is not funny," he wrote to Charles Baxter, "I am sure I do not know what it is. I have split in writing it." This remark

might give the impression that he was in the fullest sense joint author. The tale, however, was written wholly by Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, and only revised, with perhaps a few interpolations, by Stevenson.

As his custom was, he speedily established friendly relations with the natives, in particular with Kalakaua, "the last of the Hawaiian kings", a picturesque, dusky *viveur*, with a good fund of common sense, more of human nature, and culture enough, notwithstanding his colour, to discuss Herbert Spencer intelligently. His manners were courtly and ingratiating, and he had the kingly grace of being able to carry his liquor (of which there was plenty going) like the finest gentleman of Europe. Moreover, in the coiled intrigues and corruption of Polynesian politics, he was that fascinating object of interest, a prince with a grievance. He told the tale of his wrongs eloquently and effectively; Stevenson, easily fired to enthusiasm or indignation, listened with something more than sympathy.

The result, the unhappy result, was a plunge into the muddy vortex of politics. His part was to enlighten Europe, especially England, and if possible awake sleeping consciences there. Accordingly he wrote the series of letters which, to use his own words, written in another connection, stand out as "Stevenson's blooming blunder." The first letter, dated February 10, 1889, was addressed to the *Times;* the last,

written at Vailima and addressed to J. F. Hogan, M.P., appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* on March 18, 1895, three and a half months after his death. He was thus for the last five and a half years almost constantly embroiled in embittered political controversy. The charming Kalakaua was responsible for much waste of time and energy.

For the second cruise there seemed to be but a single choice — the *Morning Star* — an American missionary ship belonging to a Boston organisation. She was to start in late summer or early autumn on an annual round of stations, and her itinerary included several of the loneliest, most savage islands in the Western Pacific. Stevenson was fascinated; but there were difficulties about taking him, and even if these were overcome there were stringent restrictions — no tobacco, no liquor (champagne had lately been flowing with jovial freedom), no profane literature, and no light-hearted levity. The *Morning Star* was in effect to be a church afloat, with a daily and nightly routine of services, prayer meetings, and Bible readings.

Stevenson, as may be imagined, privily drew a wry face — and the delay irked him. One day, accordingly, he entered "a tin office" in Honolulu; when he stepped out again he had chartered the *Equator*, a seventy-ton trading schooner, which carried in her contract no missionary restrictions. He

was wildly elated. Rushing back to Waikiki, he electrified his family with the great news, himself as gleeful as a schoolboy unexpectedly let off to a cricket match at Lord's. His mother would return to Scotland, the adventure being too hazardous for her; the rest of them would visit the Gilberts, the Marshalls, the Carolines, and other haunts of enchantment. The *Equator* had first to make a business trip to San Francisco; but in June she would be back ready for any wildcat enterprise that a sea-tramp might legitimately undertake.

Unluckily his health had suffered a sharp decline. There were no hæmorrhages, catarrhs, or other pulmonary troubles such as he had in Europe; only a general lowness of vitality that precluded the possibility of sustained, concentrated effort. In a fisherman's cottage along the coast, however, he wrote or sketched "The Bottle Imp." Much more important was his visit, towards the end of May, to Molokai and its leper settlement. He had heard much of Pierre Damien, the Belgian priest, then lately dead, and his self-sacrificing devotion to the lepers. Now he learned the full story on the spot. His visit lasted a week; and the horror, the tragedy, the hideousness, of what he saw has been described by himself with almost unendurable detail and vividness. The priests and sisters he admired to the point of veneration. For, like their patients, they too had taken leave of

the world; they too were in reality doomed, doomed by their own divine aspiration to give their lives for others. Here, if anywhere on earth, here in this foul, isolated lazaretto, where all must die together and lie in forsaken graves, was the sublime effluence of Divine love. One might almost hear a gracious voice saying, *Inasmuch as ye do it unto one of these ye do it also unto Me.* And of that noble band Father Damien had been the leader. Stevenson left the settlement with a haloed picture of the dead man, a veneration which, as we shall see, blazed into fury when, as it seemed, his hero was slandered.

The *Equator* returned to time; and once more Stevenson "pulled up stakes" for fresh wanderings. Before embarking, he warned his friends "not to be in a hurry to think us dead", though the peril was considerable. They might be cast on some desolate savage island; they might go down in a squall; they might be ripped to death by fangs of coral; they might even make a feast for jolly pagans. If any of those things happened, news of the disaster would reach Britain somehow; but they should be in no haste to believe the worst. Adventurers often came to life again after being mourned as dead.

### FIRST GLIMPSES OF SAMOA

On June 24 they went on board; and at the last moment Kalakaua, cordial and convivial to the last,

drove up in state to say farewell and quaff a parting bumper of champagne. Then, to the strains of his majesty's own band, the *Equator* stood out to sea on one of the queerest voyages ever undertaken. By agreement she was to be free to go her own way and attend to her own business; in reality her course was anywhere that fancy might suggest, and fancy took a singular turn. Once afloat, Stevenson speedily recovered his buoyancy of spirit and with it much of his old impish irresponsibility. The sea was delightful; why not stick to it? The golden age of piracy, alas! was gone, with so much else that was stirring and romantic. Yes, the Jolly Roger was taboo; but what of the trader's ensign? A South Sea trader! There lay the glorious road to fortune and felicity. The captain of the *Equator*, Denis Reid, a vain, fiery, pugnacious, very efficient little Ulster-Scot, applauded, if he did not actually inspire, the idea. For in the splendid and lucrative venture he was to be a partner. There was money, heaps of it, in the scheme; and if Mr. Stevenson was out for adventure as well as fortune, why, there it was galore. And Mr. Stevenson, with his facile ardours and passion for shifting scenes, was instantly on fire. A ship of his own with the trusty Denis in command, that was the grand ideal. Capital would be needed. Well! he was master of a pen which had lately acquired a most encouraging commercial value. A new novel, a wild

thing of the sea, seething with the blood and bluster, the trickery and dare-deviltry for which an amiable public was eager to pay, would be written and sold. Then, presto! a gallant little ship with a well-stocked trade-room. The partners shook hands in great elation.

Stevenson as a South Sea trader, exchanging amenities with beach combers, alternately beguiling and bullying natives, fuddling in bars, doing a little illicit business in firewater, and ever prompt with his "shooting-irons", would be a theme for the comic Muse. Little Denis, whose favourite pastime it was to bathe among sharks, might have done brilliantly in such a part; Stevenson was scarcely cut out for the rôle. Luckily for himself and for literature, the splendid idea "petered out." The story, later named "The Wrecker", was written and sold for a good figure; but the money it brought did not go into a tramp schooner and shoddy second-hand European finery for Polynesian belles.

On July 13 the *Equator* reached Butaritari, the chief town of the Great Madin Island, to find the whole population frenzied with liquor. The place was much under American influence, and as a delicate compliment the people celebrated Independence Day by getting riotously drunk. Except a few missionaries who looked on hopelessly, and a few interested white traders, every man from his majesty the king

down was, in Scots phrase, "roarin' fou" and ominously hostile. Hostility, however, did not prevent the Stevenson party from landing and taking up a temporary residence in the house of a friendly Hawaiian missionary. With a pertinent admonition touching the folly of "taking sauce from d—— niggers", Denis Reid proceeded with the *Equator* on business of his own. For a little it seemed that the worst might happen, and that England would be startled by news of a horrible South Sea tragedy. Stevenson, venturing out on the verandah, was actually stoned, and there was a good deal of revolver-firing. In the end, partly through Stevenson's representations, the supply of liquor was cut off, and the drunken king and populace recovered their sobriety and their good manners. Then followed a month of rather monotonous quiet, while the Stevenson party awaited the return of the *Equator*.

Setting sail again, they made for the island of Nonuti; but, partly owing to change of programme, partly to change of wind, they changed their course, making for Apemama. There again they had a doubtful reception. Tembinoka, who ruled with despotic power, had tried white men in the shape of missionaries, and liked them so little that he sent them packing, with a succinct warning never again to set foot in his kingdom. "No white men" was thenceforth his fiat; and there were no white men.

When the Stevenson party arrived, in daring contravention of his edict, he looked them over grimly and announced that he would take time to consider their fate. He took forty-eight hours. Then he looked them over again. His methods of judging were peculiar. He had never heard of Lavater, yet by a process of his own he had reached some of Lavater's conclusions. Physiognomy, he held, is the true index to character. "What's in the heart comes out in the face," he said crisply. Therefore he judged men by their faces, paying particular attention to eyes and mouth. Stevenson underwent the crucial test, passed, and was forthwith admitted.

Then came a sudden and singular change. Having satisfied himself, Tembinoka not only gave his royal warrant to land, but had a site cleared and four houses of wattel and wickerwork set up for the accommodation of his visitors. More, with a nice regard for comfort and privacy, he ordained that a circle should be drawn round the Stevenson encampment and that trespassers would pass it at the peril of their lives. To give a touch of realism to the ordinance, he took a rifle and fired several rounds in the air, in token of vengeance should his order be disobeyed. Occasionally, too, he honoured his guests with his company, and more than once dined with them royally on salt junk. They had their own cook, Ah Fu, a frowsy but devoted and ingenious China-

man, picked up in more or less derelict condition at one of the stopping places; but Tembinoka sent his own *chef* so that the cooking might be satisfactory. All that he did in the conviction that Stevenson was a great white chief on his travels, fabulously rich and the owner of innumerable slaves — with vast military and naval forces in the background. Probably the most graphic passage in the "South Seas" is that in which that dusky Napoleon, with his imperious temper and his Dante-like profile, is described. At Apemama, after the first flutter of excitement, Stevenson lived quietly for two months, studying native manners, customs, and folk-lore, witnessing native festivals and gleefully collaborating with Mr. Lloyd Osbourne in writing "The Wrecker."

The *Equator* meanwhile was absent on another business of her own. She was to return in three weeks; the three passed, then a month and most of a second month, and yet she did not appear. Once more stores ran short; and a little timorously the situation was explained to Tembinoka. Could he spare anything from the royal larder? Spare anything! With princely munificence he answered that all he possessed was at the service of his guests; would they do him the honour to help themselves? And once more the situation was saved. The *Equator* was so long delayed that she was given up for lost. But Denis Reid, who had a charmed life even among

sharks, was not the man to founder or go to pieces on coral reefs. At last he came trim and smiling with the explanation that he had been becalmed on his way from Aroria Island, where he had been doing a little private "dickering" with the natives. To all but Tembinoka he was welcome and doubly welcome. That old enemy of white men had taken so strong a fancy to Stevenson, and indeed to the whole party, that he schemed to detain them; when the inevitable hour of departure came he actually wept, laying his hand on his heart with vows of eternal friendship. As a parting gift he presented Stevenson with a set of corselets, precious family heirlooms which he particularly prized; and Stevenson once again celebrated native chivalry and goodness in verse. Not to be outdone, Tembinoka also broke into verse some time later. Thus with mutual regrets and good-will the visit ended and the good faith of the white man was vindicated.

By the end of October the travellers were again at sea, heading southward in a series of gales and calms. Early in December they "rose like whales from this long dive" in the track of civilisation. Before the week was out they sighted the wooded heights of Upolu, the chief of the Samoan or Navigator group of islands, as they made for Apia, the port and capital. According to his custom, Stevenson was on deck eagerly noting salient features and land-

marks. Did his gaze by any chance rest for a moment on the green slopes of Mount Væa? He was fond of imagining himself a Gael, of ascribing to himself the Gael's intuitions and previsions. Had he any prevision then, any premonition of what was to be? Did an eerie voice whisper half audibly in his soul, "Behold the mountain." In the brilliant sunshine it flashed and burned in dazzling green flame to the towering peak that was to be the Mecca of many hearts in many lands. The *Equator* all unconscious slipped along, glided into Apia Harbour and cast anchor. Another stage was ended, another epoch opened in his strange, eventful career.

## CHAPTER VI

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF SAMOA

STEVENSON meant to make Apia a mere "mile-mark", a sort of half-way house on his rambling, circuitous progress homeward. The message to his friends still was that he would be home in June: and would n't that be a meeting! He grew lyrical at the thought of walking into the Savile Club, a bronzed, lusty, striding figure, to take his friends there by surprise. There might even be a hurried visit to Edinburgh, with a run round the old dingy haunts in Leith Walk and High Street in the company of Charles Baxter. Some of the most ardent, most touching passages in his letters relate to that home-going in the June that never came. Destiny had other plans for him. He was to make yet other excursions and voyages, to visit yet more remote islands and strange peoples; but little as he dreamt it, when the *Equator* cast anchor and he looked forth on the one straggling street of wooden houses which made the town of Apia, in reality he had reached his *ultima thule*.

But the future held its secret; and, exhilarated by

the fond prospect ahead, he was in the gayest holiday spirits. He was also in the gayest holiday attire — calico shirt, white flannel trousers, rakish yachting cap — and bare feet, almost as striking a figure as when he walked Piccadilly in black shirt and tasselled smoking-cap, or parti-coloured cloak and tiny sailor hat decorated with pink ribbon. The Samoans smiled as the people of Edinburgh and London had smiled; but if amused they were polite, and he enjoyed the attention. Before landing he was greeted by Mr. H. J. Moors, an American trader well known in those parts, who had been advised of his coming. The accommodation and the fare at the single hotel in Apia being both primitive and defective, Mr. Moors invited the whole party to be his guests in his own house. There they spent several happy weeks; then they rented a small cottage some distance above the town, but close to the Moors' residence.

Meanwhile, after a "celebration dinner" given by Stevenson in honour of Captain Denis Reid, the *Equator* once more hoisted sail and went off on her own trading ventures. Immediately Stevenson turned energetically to the task of collecting further material for his book on the South Seas. For that purpose he interviewed all and sundry — English, American, German, and Samoan (through an interpreter); made excursions, some of them extending over several days, with the Reverend W. E. Clarke,

of the London Missionary Society, the Reverend J. E. Newell, and others.

First impressions of Samoa were disappointing. Compared with much he had seen, the scenery was tame, and the climate was much less heavenly than that of Tautira. Nor were the people so wholly to his mind as some he had met on other islands. The men, to be sure, were well set up and carried themselves with dignity; and the women, as he did not fail to inform Charles Baxter, were "very attractive and dressed lovely", that is, when they could be said to dress at all. In general, most of them "wore a smile and little else", save at dances, festivals, and religious services, for which they adorned themselves elaborately. One of his earliest experiences was to be arrested and fined for furious riding in the street, though, as he complained, the wife of a German store manager nearly rode him down twice, and there "was none to say her nay." Of German influence and German insolence we shall see more presently.

Stevenson then was less in love with Samoa than with several other places he had visited; yet he was there but a few weeks when he reached a decision which was to alter the whole course of his life. A suggestion from Mr. Moors that he should buy land and remain set him thinking. With possible memories of Scott and Abbotsford, he was fascinated by the idea of owning an estate and being the master of many

servants. After viewing "several desirable properties", he authorised Mr. Moors to purchase for him four hundred acres of jungle on the side of Mount Væa three miles above Apia. The price was to be $4,000 (£800). The land was entirely virgin forest, and although Stevenson made much show of clearing and cultivating, the area cleared never exceeded fifteen acres. But it was a real estate, with possessions of cattle (could they be caught) and the prospect of a retinue of dependents. Clearing and building operations began at once, for it was necessary to have a house of some sort.

In the new conditions, which involved so drastic a change in his modes of life, Stevenson was much dependent on the practical and very effective assistance of his wife, and scarcely less on that of his stepson. Then, or a little earlier, Mr. Lloyd Osbourne was offered the important and well-paid post of secretary to the newly formed Samoan Land Commission which the three Great Powers were putting into operation under three special commissioners. The offer was a tempting one to a young man ambitious for a career; but at Stevenson's pressing request it was refused. "I need you at Vailima," he said earnestly, and the matter was settled. The result was the literary partnership which lasted unbroken and harmonious to the end of Stevenson's life and was of immense service to him. After his death,

as is well known, Mr. Lloyd Osbourne continued to write fiction, and made an independent reputation as a novelist of force and originality.

Meanwhile Stevenson was hungering for news from home. "The Wrong Box" and "The Master of Ballantrae" had both been published during his cruisings, the first in June, the second in September, and he knew nothing of their reception by Press or public. When news at last reached him it was cheering. "The Wrong Box", indeed, had been treated somewhat cavalierly; but of "The Master of Ballantrae" the reviews, with some notable exceptions, were eminently favourable; the sales too, though not sensational, were gratifying. There was, however, one particular fly in the ointment which poisoned all the praise. Henley disliked the book and said so without circumlocution. He found the story grimy, ugly, depressing, ill-constructed. Stevenson disputed the justice of the epithet "grimy"; "grim" he owned, but not grimy. All the same, the judgment stung and rankled; for of all possible critics and readers Henley was the one whose good opinion he most desired to have.

In the circumstances Henley was not, perhaps, a quite dispassionate judge. Yet a little later so sound and impartial a critic as Leslie Stephen not only agreed with him, but added a severe judgment on Stevenson's whole work as a novelist. In general his

old and very helpful editor found Stevenson's characters lacking in reality and often in charm. They had not, he said, the breath of life with which the great masters infuse their creations. They inspired no "very lively affection or sympathy." In "The Master of Ballantrae" he was repelled by "the utterly reprobate Master"; while the younger brother who is "blackmailed ought to be interesting", and not merely "sullen and dogged." "He is cramped in character, because a man of any real strength would have broken the meshes upon which the adventure depends."[1] Stephen, in fact, found the book wanting in the fundamental elements of power. Moreover, taste, the instinct which guides the artist in the selection and treatment of his material, had gone astray with deplorable results. Such in effect was his criticism.

Stevenson himself placed the book "on the line with 'Kidnapped'"; but it must be remarked that even ardent Stevensonians have been compelled to concur in Leslie Stephen's judgment. And yet, as I have already indicated, "The Master of Ballantrae" contains, in my opinion, by far the most powerful work Stevenson had done at the stage in his career then reached. Once and once only was he to do better, to show greater mastery, greater freedom of movement, greater vitality and creative energy.

[1] "Studies of a Biographer." Second Series.

True, in "The Master of Ballantrae" the characters are unpleasant and the situations sometimes ridiculous. Hence sweeping judgments which are often, I think, distinctly unjust.

Every novelist knows that amiable, watery-eyed characters, sentimentally delineated, are an easy passport to the big, soft, childish heart of the public. Dickens (to take but a single flagrant example) traded on that knowledge to an extent which is often unconscionable and occasionally nauseating. In "The Master of Ballantrae" sloppy sentimentality was not Stevenson's cue. He is not, therefore, to be censured because his characters do not conform to the preconceptions of the sentimentalist who insists on sweetness and tears. Stevenson's real offence, one suspects, was, not that he failed in execution or that his characters and situations are disagreeable, but that in the eyes of worshippers he was false to himself, to his own engaging gospel of gaiety, of romantic and chivalrous behaviour; and for that defection even partisans refuse to forgive him.

### DREAMS OF HOME — THE DAMIEN LETTER

Pending the necessary clearing and building, a work committed to the care of Mr. Moors, Stevenson and his family decided to visit Sydney, where longed-for home letters were expected. Accordingly, on the 2nd or 3rd of February, 1890, they embarked on the

German steamer *Lubeck*, which called at Apia on her regular voyage from San Francisco. In reality they were embarking for England, since Sydney was to be a mere port of call on the way home. There they would join a P. & O. or Orient liner, and by early summer — by June, the still magical June — they would be in London. Over that prospect Stevenson at any rate was in an ecstasy of excitement. Of all the words that the exile can utter or hear, the simple phrase "homeward bound" is the most thrilling. It reduces rough, hardened, bearded men to tears; it makes mothers frantically embrace their children in paroxysms of a joy too deep for anything but sobs. It moved Stevenson to a delirious intoxication. He was going home, home to the grey land of his dreams, with its eager, welcoming faces; and he was going with restored health, with an enhanced reputation, with the magic and the glamour of the tropics. In "A Child's Garden of Verses" he had pictured the wandering adventurer returning rich and famous; now he was that adventurer himself. With that feeling vibrating in his heart he entered the beautiful, landlocked harbour of Sydney, amid the crowded shipping of the world. But Sydney immediately disagreed with him. He caught cold, had a serious hæmorrhage, and took to bed. Still he was going home, only now the date was September instead of June. The delay of three months was disappointing;

but, after all, did it not give a keener edge to the joy of anticipation?

Of Sydney and its sights and society this fresh collapse prevented him from seeing much. But the old habit of work remained; and soon after his arrival an incident happened which roused his energies and fired his indignation to white heat. One evening, over the dinner table, reference was made to Father Damien and the Molokai lepers. Some one asked if he had seen a newspaper letter written by Doctor Hyde, a Presbyterian minister or missionary whom he had met in Honolulu, casting grave aspersions on the moral character of Damien. He was shown the paper, a "religious" one, read the letter, and leaped to his feet in furious anger. He must reply at once, must "smash" the traducer of a dead man for whom he had conceived an ardent admiration.

But to give his thoughts and sentiments wing would land him in the meshes of the law. An action for libel would certainly follow — with disastrous financial results. What should he do? Relieve his soul, vindicate a maligned hero and face ruin, or hold his peace in a cowardly fear. A family conference was held, and the decision was "fight." Accordingly the famous defence was written. It was the work of a single morning, and stands now almost exactly as it was in the first swift draft. Thus hastily composed it was as hastily dispatched, "so that it was delivered

to the London and New York dailies, the *Argus* and other papers, as nearly as possible on the same day." [1] The London papers do not appear to have used it; but it was printed in two instalments in the *Scots Observer* for May 3 and 10, and was immediately published as a booklet by Messrs. Chatto and Windus. Stevenson made the publishers a gift of it, because, as he informed his mother, he was not a cannibal and could not eat the flesh of Doctor Hyde.[2]

The little book bears the marks both of the haste and the surging anger in which it was written. Inspired by an overheated chivalry, it runs too easily into unreasoned vehemence and personalities. Thus it lacks the deadly urbanity with which Newman pierced and demolished Kingsley. Its accuracy, too, has been impugned by those familiar with the circumstances. But when writing it Stevenson was in no humour to condescend upon such trifles as the verification of facts. He was in the mood for invective; and invective, even when Juvenal is the writer, is apt to exaggerate; in fact, it may be said that exaggeration of a biting kind is the soul of invective. By and by, when coolness and reflection brought a

[1] A well informed writer in the Sydney *Sun* to whom I am indebted for much information regarding Stevenson's visits to Sydney.

[2] The late Andrew Chatto sent the author's share of profits to the leper settlement at Molokai, an act of grace which gave Stevenson much pleasure. An edition of the Damien letter was privately printed by the Ben Franklin Printing Company, Sydney. This was limited to twenty-five copies; a second privately printed edition consisted of thirty copies and bore the imprint of an Edinburgh printer.

saner, better-balanced judgment, Stevenson himself regretted its violence. He confessed it was "barbarously harsh", and that he might have defended Damien equally well without inflicting pain on those who were innocent. Elsewhere he inculcated gentleness and kindness; with Doctor Hyde he was the reverse of gentle and kind.

And the man whose "conventional halo" he was, so to speak, enlarging and burnishing certainly could not be said to have kept himself unspotted from the world. A year earlier Stevenson himself described the Belgian peasant turned priest as "dirty, bigoted, untruthful, unwise, tricky." It is clear, too, that in the virtue of chastity he was lacking, not because of inherent viciousness, but because he was not strong enough to resist the horrible degrading influences which enfolded and penetrated him like an atmosphere. Doctor Hyde had, therefore, more justification than Stevenson in the first heat of outraged loyalty would see or admit. Moreover, it is fair to remember that the offending letter was not meant for publication, and got into print without its writer's sanction or knowledge. In the end, too, Doctor Hyde proved himself the better Christian if not the bigger man. For, instead of bringing an action for libel and pocketing a substantial sum as damages, he contented himself with the remark that his assailant was a "Bohemian crank", a negligible person whose

opinion signified nothing. So no bones were broken, no purses depleted. But for four months the affair kept Stevenson in a state of painful suspense and agitation.

But agitated or tranquil, ill or well, his "dire industry" persisted. In collaboration with Mr. Lloyd Osbourne he was then busy with "The Wrecker", and in random walks and excursions about Sydney he picked up suggestions and incidents which were utilised in that rambling, jerky, inchoate tale. With his usual readiness, too, he gave a Press interviewer his theories of the art of fiction. In his own practice he tried "to represent what was conspicuous and representable" in the world about him. "I try to do so," he said; "on the whole to give pleasure and rouse interest," an aim by no means peculiar to him. He believed "in looking to the characters and passions, getting over the ground, despising detail, and appealing to the strong, common sentiments directly", again by no means a peculiar aim. As to methods of work, he liked to have several books in hand at the same time, because he found that "the whole secret of sustained intellectual effort lay in turning opportunely from one story to another." Thus, "although apparently entirely occupied with the immediate work in hand, one part of the brain was starting up new ideas."[1]

[1] The Sydney *Sun*.

The plan is interesting and has tempted many novelists; but its wisdom or utility is doubtful. In general it may confidently be affirmed that the more intensely the imagination works, the more it is excited and absorbed, the less likely it is to divide its energies. A great creative mind, vigorous and fecund, may and does produce rapidly; but it produces by concentration, not by dispersion of force. "One thing at a time" is its inexorable rule. Examined closely, Stevenson's method may be found to imply a defective power of concentration, in other words, of energy, or at any rate an impatience or inability under the strain of prolonged creative effort, and a consequent desire to seek relief by "switching off" to something that seems more agreeable or less exacting. It may also account for the extraordinary number of fragmentary stories and sketches, works often begun in a burst of high inspiration and dropped abortively, which, as I have said, strew his course. But here we touch the question of his whole native equipment as a novelist, a question which must be deferred.

After eighteen months of comparative well being, health was again the most urgent of problems. In the beginning of March he announced to Charles Baxter that the Sydney visit had "smashed" him, brought, in fact, the old prostrating sequence of disorders — cold, fever, and hæmorrhage, with an

inevitable droop in spirits. One thing, however, remained — the inspiring hope of that ardently projected home-going, though now the risks were visibly increased. In the harbour out yonder, whence came the hoarse clamour of steam sirens, there swung at their moorings British ships which would presently be setting their glorious course for England, for Tilbury. And was not one of them his ship?

Oh, yes, one day soon, very soon, he would go bravely up Channel, with bunting spread to the breeze, hail the white cliffs of Albion with ineffable rapture, and hear bands and riotous merriment on Thames pleasure-steamers; ay, and, dearer yet, hear the bugles blow, as once he heard them, on the castle esplanade above Princes Street, or, better still, thrill to the music of the pipes as the Black Watch went gaily past to the quick-step of "The Highland Laddie" or "The Campbells are Coming." Such ardours of hope are at once the joy, the inspiration, and the pathos of life. "It is better to travel than to arrive", was a favourite sentiment with Stevenson. In imagination he did much enchanting, intoxicating travel just then.

The home-going, as we have seen, was postponed for three months; and now, as the weary weeks passed, keeping him prisoner in his bedroom on a diet of drugs and eggnogg, it became increasingly clear that there must be yet another postponement.

As he waited, coughing, spitting blood, rolling interminable cigarettes with lean, stained fingers, a terrible foreboding began to possess him. What if he should never go home at all, never again behold the land he loved and the dear familiar faces beam in welcome? The breakdown at such a point in his homeward journey seemed a wanton outrage, a piece of pure, premeditated malice on the part of a jealous Fate. So many thrilling visions dimmed; so many beautiful castles vanishing into thin air. But the hope that "springs eternal in the human breast", and especially in the breast of the consumptive and exile, dies hard; it was false philosophy to be glum; therefore he was cheerful; he even yearned to entertain himself (and incense others) with his beloved flageolet, only, unfortunately, the rules of the Union Club forbade performances which might cause a breach of the peace.

### THE PACIFIC — OR DEATH

But unless there was to be a swift end to everything — hope, joy, even life itself — one thing was imperatively necessary — to get away with all utmost speed from Sydney. "The Pacific — or death" was the stern decree. Only whither and, more immediately pertinent, how? For at the moment shipping was paralysed by a seamen's strike, a less familiar form of paralysis then than it has since become. On

Mrs. Stevenson fell the duty of finding means of escape, and, as always in a crisis, she proved the resourceful, beneficent angel. Scouting in dockland, she discovered that a trading steamer, the *Janet Nicoll*, was about to start for the Gilberts and other outlying islands with a "make-up" crew of Solomon Islanders. Here was her chance. Would the *Janet Nicoll* take the Stevenson party on board as passengers? The answer was a decided negative. The request was repeated, and again came a scornful refusal. But the need was terrible; life or death, that was the dread issue, and it was not in Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson to resign herself to failure. From clerks and underlings she went to the owners or agents, who bore the good Scots names of Henderson and Macfarlane. They too shook their heads. They were sorry; but they could not allow a woman on board; it was against the code even in the free-and-easy South Seas. Besides, a superstitious "black-boy" crew, in certain easily imagined contingencies, might regard a sick man as a Jonah — with tragic consequences.

But her resolution was invincible; few women have ever been more resolute. "Think what you are doing," she said, not perhaps without a minatory gesture. "My husband is at the point of death. It lies in your power to save him, and you leave him to die." Thus nakedly put to common humanity, the

appeal prevailed — aided, it may be, by Scots clannishness. It does not appear that Messrs. Henderson and Macfarlane were at all acquainted with the writings or reputation of their distressed but distinguished countryman. When at last all was ready, Stevenson was in such a condition of feebleness that he had to be carried to the quayside, pulled in a special boat to the *Janet Nicoll* and lifted like a helpless invalid on board. He was just in time to see a drunken member of the crew, a white man, who had fallen off the gangway, fished out of the water and set on the deck, dripping and hiccoughing, to recover his senses.

It is not necessary to relate in detail the incidents of the new cruise, for in the main they were the incidents of the former cruises repeated with little variation. The only real novelty was that the craft was a steamer, with engine power which made her more or less independent of the weather. There was the added advantage of size; for by comparison with the *Casco* and the *Equator* the *Janet Nicoll*, with her 600 tons register, her two bathrooms, her spacious deck, and her business-like screw, had almost the magnificence of an Atlantic liner. She did not flop or drowse idly in calms; but in squalls or rough weather she was fiendishly freakish. "The worst roller I have ever been aboard of," was Stevenson's description of her. Yet he enjoyed the rolling, and

once properly at sea picked up as by magic. The company, too — Henderson, head of the Sydney firm, Ben Hird, supercargo, an adventurous Aberdonian with a romantic record, and Jack Buckland, stated to be the original of Tommy Haddon in "The Wrecker" — were all jovial good fellows; and it may be supposed that in the saloon of an evening, when the *Janet Nicoll* was not too frisky, Stevenson added volubly to the hum of voices.

In the general entertainment Jack Buckland supplied the comic element and supplied it effectively; Jack was extremely handsome, and on the score of his good looks had once "walked on" in a Sydney theatre. Ever afterwards, as Mr. Lloyd Osbourne informs me, "he naïvely regarded himself as an actor, and often referred to the time when he was on the stage", adding that he "always meant to take it up seriously later on." It chanced that, lashed to the deck, the *Janet Nicoll* carried as part of her cargo an immense pulpit. "Jack Buckland," as Mr. Lloyd Osbourne tells me, "announced he would give the company a Shakespearean recitation. He was much keyed up about it, was intensely serious, and without the least feeling of incongruity, and dressed in pyjamas, he mounted the pulpit and began to mumble Mark Antony's speech over Cæsar. R. L. S. laughed till it almost killed him; he was speechless, purple, and though he did not actually roll on the deck, it

was the next thing to it. And he not only laughed then; but I think he laughed the whole succeeding week whenever any reference was made to it." They were all, however, so fond of Jack that, as Mr. Lloyd Osbourne remarks, they "would not have hurt his feelings for the world, which, of course, intensified the hilarity we tried in vain to conceal."

The first part of the voyage to Auckland was made in an extraordinarily heavy sea; Stevenson took the tossing and pitching of the ship like a veteran mariner; but Mrs. Stevenson, who "hated the sea", was in distress, as she often was on board ship. A stay of a day was made at Auckland; but the party appear to have seen little or nothing of the town, being probably in no mood for sightseeing. An incident which for a little caused intense excitement and alarm marked the departure. The enterprising Buckland had stowed some fireworks in his berth. They exploded, causing a blaze which threatened serious damage. In a sudden panic the "black-boy" crew seem to have lost their heads. At any rate, they made an indiscriminate rush to get rid of all articles that were on fire or might take fire. Just in time Mrs. Stevenson came upon two of them as they were about to toss a burning trunk overboard; with a startled cry she stopped them. The burning trunk contained all Stevenson's manuscripts and papers. By a vigorous use of the hose, in which Stevenson and Lloyd

Osbourne aided gallantly, the fire was extinguished. Some clothes and a valuable collection of photographs were lost, and considerable damage was done to the ship's fittings, but luckily not enough to detain her; and, reeking of charred timber, she put to sea in weather so glorious that it made amends for all discomforts.

From that point we may follow the course of the party swiftly in a sort of bird's-eye view. They put in at Apia, staying just long enough to enable Stevenson to inspect his new property, see how his new home was progressing, and learn from his agent, Mr. Moors, how ex-cannibals were behaving as workmen. Thence they proceeded to the Gilbert and Marshall Islands, which were reached without accident or incident worth recording. They saw some old friends, in particular Tembinoka, now, alas! fallen on evil days. His people were ravaged by measles, probably a gift from the white man; and in general things were gone sadly awry with him. He received Stevenson with tearful joy, knowing he should never see his strange white friend again. Some months later he died in pathetic circumstances. Such are the meetings and partings appointed to the children of Adam in every clime, in every age, in every condition.

On the whole the cruise was not exhilarating nor in the grand essential to any degree successful. Health, after the first upward bound on leaving

Sydney, had once more drooped dismally. There was again blood-spitting, with other disquieting symptoms, and a lassitude harder to bear, perhaps, than active disease. Nor were external circumstances of a particularly inspiriting kind. Interesting moments there were when he mixed with natives innocent of civilised manners and creeds, though human enough to be covetous, sometimes with the most engaging *naïveté*. Thus at Savage Island "one pretty, stalwart minx with a red flower behind her ear" picked his pocket of tobacco and matches, and then coquettishly returned *one* match, as he gleefully reported to Mr. Colvin. But on the whole interest was neither deep nor lively. Five-and-thirty islands, as he noted, were visited, some of them for an hour only; and he found that hackney cabs had greater variety than low atolls. The one saving compensation was the quality of the company and the fare on board the *Janet Nicoll*, both of which were excellent.

### MISDIRECTED ENERGY

Meanwhile he gave every available moment, every atom of energy, to work, in conditions little conducive to success. His small cabin or workroom was close to the engines, and, penetrated by their heat and oily odours, intensified by a tropical heat from without, the atmosphere was not merely oppressive, it was prostrating. He sweltered in semi-nudeness,

liquefying till there scarcely seemed a scrap of the lean, wasted body left. And the work was those South Sea Letters which his most discriminating admirers wish had never been written. It was indeed work which he should never have undertaken. For his was not the facile pen of the Special Correspondent who arrives upon a new scene, glances at an object, a situation, or a people, and proceeds to write *currente-calamo* as if describing the fruits of a lifelong study. There were many writers of his own day, lightsome, peripatetic journalists much inferior to Stevenson in all essential qualities of vision and of style, who nevertheless could and would have written descriptions of romantic roamings among savage tropic islands far exceeding his in vividness and human interest.

Mrs. Stevenson, with a quick, critical acumen, protested against the whole basic scheme of those unfortunate South Sea studies, and even invoked the aid of Mr. Colvin to get it altered or modified. But, having once resolved, Stevenson was not the man to be either persuaded or dissuaded by the logic or the sentiment of others. Now he was determined to be grandly spacious, impressively scientific. He would write the history of those dusky Southern peoples, so interesting and so little known, as it ought to be written. He would be an anthropologist, a mythologist, a folk-lorist, a philologist; he would explore

witchcraft and statecraft, the glories of war and the achievements of peace, with equal rigour and impartiality: in a word, he would be at once the Herodotus and the Thucydides of a race. And to realise that ambition he toiled till his eyes were half blind and his senses swam from sheer fatigue. Looking back upon misapplied, misdirected effort, we may regret his obstinacy; but it is impossible to withhold our admiration for his strenuous, dogged persistency.

At the same time he was busily evolving yet other schemes of labour. To Burlingame he wrote from the *Janet Nicoll* proposing a new series of essays which he sketched in some detail. Andrew Lang was then contributing, and for several years afterwards continued to contribute, a monthly causerie to *Longman's Magazine* under the title of "At the Sign of the Ship." It was light, literary, readable, often personal, and nearly always piquantly spiced with prejudice. Thus, nimble in style and individualistic in tone, it interested Stevenson, as it interested bookish coteries in London; and somewhat on the same pattern he proposed to model his projected series. Burlingame, however, appears to have been lukewarm, or entirely indifferent; at any rate, the scheme went to swell the long list of Stevenson's abortive enterprises. He further made suggestions for a volume of verse, already written in part, and in part hanging nebulously in the very uncertain future.

It is essential to bear in mind that Stevenson loved writing for its own sake; that he never suffered that strange repugnance to the simple act of taking up a pen which so many writers, some of them men of genius, have experienced. Yet it is not to be supposed that all that persistent, anxious, overheated activity came of an innate love of work. In "An Apology for Idlers", which simple people like to take as a quintessential piece of Stevenson's philosophy, he had written with contempt of the arduous, agitated, purposeful souls who are for ever afflicted with a passion for useful, lucrative labour. Such people, he said, "cannot be idle; their nature is not generous enough; and they pass those hours in a sort of coma which are not devoted to furious moiling in the gold-mill."

That was the view of seven-and-twenty, when life seemed a delectable promenade through gardens of spice, or at least a delightful progress through a world rich in vibrating interest and exquisite sensations to any one with wit enough to catch and enjoy them. But Time, the great disenchanter, had shattered those beautiful illusions. Now at forty the gay apostle of idleness was discovering what the Greek poet had discovered so long before, that, of all forces operative in the universe, none is mightier than necessity. The glory of morning had passed to dusty noon, and the heat and burden of the day were becoming grievous. Not airy romance, but the con-

ventional commonplace problem of bread and butter, was now the engrossing, compelling interest. Stevenson *had* to work, to moil furiously in the gold-mill. The new nomadic life, with its strange Odysseus-wanderings, its swift vicissitudes, and driftings to and fro by land and sea, was terribly expensive. If he were not to sink under a piled-up load of debt, or fall back on his mother — and pride revolted against both ideas — the busy means of keeping the coffers from running empty must be plied unceasingly.

Even with all his efforts he did not know whether he were solvent or bankrupt, though his fears ran uneasily on bankruptcy. He was still haunted by the Damien-Hyde affair. Had Hyde turned on him to make him a beggar? He did not know, for he was away from all means of communication. And there was another thing. Behind, beneath all like a secret spur, often like a spectre that awed and unnerved, was the ever-present thought that he "stood environed with responsibilities", that he had others dependent upon him. His failure would mean suffering to them, how dire he dared not imagine. Hence those prodigious labours over his History, his Letters for the McClure Syndicate, his fiction and his projected essays.

On her return voyage the *Janet Nicoll* touched at Noumea, New Caledonia, the French penal settlement, and there Stevenson left the ship, allowing his

wife and stepson to proceed to Sydney without him. In regard to health the cruise was a failure. Utterly worn out, he tried to get rest ashore away from the malodorous heat of the steamer. A further reason was that he wished to delay his return to Sydney in the midst of what was there the cold season, that is, August. Furthermore, his insatiable curiosity found fresh interest in investigating the French convict system. He remained a week enjoying the society and the hospitality of French officers, whom he found exceedingly civil and pleasant.

Their civility, indeed, was at one point embarrassing. The Governor invited him to a reception; he was without dress clothes, probably did not possess that despised symbol of social convention which he had ridiculed in his Edinburgh days. But as it was necessary for the moment to bow to convention, a dress suit made for a large, stout man was hastily cut down for his "gossamer dimensions." The remodelling was done with so free a hand by a Polish tailor that the wearer appeared at the official function a "sight inconceivable", as he humorously told Charles Baxter. The coat bulged at the waist "like a bustle" (those were the days of bustles), the flaps embraced in front, and the sleeves were not sleeves but shapeless bags. To none was the comic appearance more amusing than to himself, and he bore it with an air of invincible gaiety.

At heart, however, he was all sadness and gloom; for his battle was daily becoming sterner, more complicated and difficult. Before landing, he had reached the momentous decision which was to cut him off for ever from the past, the decision that in reality demolished all hope of returning to Europe save as a potential summer visitor. Already, indeed, arrangements were in progress for the transport of his household possessions to Samoa. Finances, unhappily, were at a low ebb, but, as he explained to Baxter, he had no alternative. He must preserve his life even at the risk of bankruptcy.

In itself the Samoan venture might or might not pay, in all likelihood it would not; but it held the only promise or possibility of recovering some modicum of health. With restored vigour, if Heaven were kind, he could at least work — surely that last resource would not be denied him — and by the earnings of his pen he hoped not only to save against contingencies, but to replace the capital he had taken for cruising trips and land purchase. In any case, it would give a comfortable feeling to have a "roof and a farm" of his own. The rest he must leave to Fate.

Before the end of August he was again in Sydney, trying to adjust himself and his affairs to the altered conditions. Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, with a hired assistant named King, had already gone to arrange and complete the final "flitting" from Skerryvore to

Apia, thus severing the last link in the chain with home. It had undergone many wrenches; it was now for ever cut. So much had been that could never be again; and the future was dismally dark and foreboding. To casual observers, and even to correspondents, Stevenson maintained his air of philosophic cheerfulness, but beneath the smiling exterior was deep, intense depression. There was still that faint-glimmering hope of a summer flight to Europe, perhaps to some spot in Southern France where his friends could visit him; but it had become too weak, too remote to yield any real solace.

### A PALMIST'S DELINEATION

Again he was a prisoner in his room at the Union Club (Mrs. Stevenson was in lodgings), where he worked languidly over proofs of verses written before and during his recent voyagings — presently to emerge as the volume of "Ballads" we know. In connection with those Sydney visits, so disappointing in themselves, I am able to present a document of singular interest. In the museum there was a cast of Stevenson's right hand and wrist, the work, I judge, of Mr. Allen Hutchinson, an English sculptor, for some time resident in Honolulu. During a professional visit to Sydney, Mrs. K. H. St. Hill, well known as an exponent of the science of hand-reading, was allowed to make a drawing of the cast, to which

she had added a minute study. With great courtesy she has supplied me with her reading, which I believe my readers will find an illuminative delineation of no little psychological interest. Mrs. St. Hill writes:

"It is a great misfortune that we have only one hand to consider. The artist who cast the late R. L. Stevenson's hand was not a cheirologist: he had no idea of the value attached to both hands as a correlative mental study; his desire was to possess a representation of the hand that carried out the work of the brain. Having only one hand, therefore, upon which to form our cheirological conclusions, it was necessary to study carefully the back of the cast, for the back of the hand is in a less degree very important in palmistry; we judge the shape and length of fingers and thumb better from the back, and it gives us the outline of the nails, which is denied in a flat drawing.

"The hand was long, narrow, and slim, delicate in outline, very refined. The palm was thin, almost to attenuation, the small, threadlike bones were clearly defined under the skin, and from the appearance of the outline, one would easily conclude that the hand must have been very supple and flexible, but without much physical strength or any force at all. It is almost a womanly hand, and the nature must have corresponded with the type.

"Taking first the back of the hand, we perceive

that the fingers — measured anatomically from the knuckle to the tip of the middle finger — are longer than the palm, which gives great sensitiveness and culture, the rule of the qualities of the mind over the emotions and senses. The joints, or knots, appear somewhat strongly developed, but this is occasioned, I think, by the thinness of the hand, the flesh having shrunk between the joints, and not from any particular development of these latter parts of anatomy, as, taken by themselves, they are fine and small in keeping with the type of hand. There is a certain amount of order, therefore, due chiefly to fastidiousness, but no great incredulity, only the hesitation and doubtfulness due to a considerable mixture of the Saturnian temperament.

"The short, round nails differ in size and appearance on the several fingers. Temper must have been hasty in some matters and patient in others. In the question of control, as shown by that of the first finger, which is the shortest of them, there must have been considerable rebellious feeling, and irritability under criticism from the Saturnian, or second; but the Apollo, or third, finger-nail is longer, the temper is sweeter in affairs of art, and in management, the Mercurian, or fourth, finger shows much greater patience. One would have earnestly studied the colour of the nails and the marks on them, had it been possible, but unfortunately no record of this

important point has been kept. That would have shown at once if temper was affected by health, and to what degree, and this would have been a keynote to all those things in which the mind is liable to be influenced by the physical temperament. When we look at the spaces between the fingers, they appear rather closely set, yet this is due rather to the angle at which the thumb is set on the hand, which is very much to the front of the palm, after the fashion of the Greek statues, which always makes it appear as if the thumb is set very close, especially from the back view. The independence of thought is very apparent in the spaces between the fingers, much more so than that of action. The thumb is long, and conical in shape. There is much will-power, but it is easily influenced and somewhat changeable, open to ideas, and not obstinate. The fingers are long and delicate, and had they been less fragile and quite straight, they would have come near to the sculptor's ideal; but the dominant Mercury, the fourth, is the only one that rises to real perfection in shape. They show the idealistic temperament with the reasoning ability combined, and, the two principal fingers being those of Jupiter and Mercury, it gives the tendency to cultivate literature, the inspiration for which is given by the line of head and the Mount of Lunar, the imagination.

"The index-finger is straight and well formed. It

is on a hand that would influence more than rule, where liberty is more desired than command. Yet there is a semblance of authority about it, of dignity, of reverence. The second finger is rather over-developed, there is much of the Saturnian type in the disposition, it gives a certain hesitation, a fear of consequences, and will make the mind very analytical, at times a trifle morbid. The third finger on such a hand is certainly a surprise. The finger of the Sun is much spoiled by being crooked; this is so unexpected that one is inclined to wonder if it might not be the result of an accident. If not, it would cause great concentration of brain-power and imagination on literature, to the exclusion of art. But if there is a disappointment suffered from the crooked Apollo, it is with great satisfaction that we can turn to the beautiful finger of Mercury, the fourth. The power of carrying out the talent of the head, and the genius of the imagination, is undoubted: it is shown by the dominance of this finger over its fellows, and in its position, set away from the palm and from its feeble and crooked companion. Language and style are given by the long, square first phalanx acting together with a long line of head, the only fault being the low setting of the finger on to the palm, which has its outcome generally in the difficulty experienced by its owner in achieving his natural superiority in his earlier efforts in life. Of the Mounts I can say but

little. The palm was very flat. There was some Mercury, enough for the sense of fun, a little Jupiter, sociability, but not much; a flat plain of Mars, giving courage, but not much self-control, unless the lower mount was hard; little Venus, but a fine Luna. This mount, that of imagination, coupled with a long, sloping line of head, was the source of his genius, the line on which it had to be carried out being shown by the shape of the fingers and palm.

"As to the lines, evidently the original cast was made when the owner was very ill. They were very faint, and gave the impression that they were fading out, which, as is well known, is one of the most serious signs of bad health known to cheirology. The line of heart was affected physically, being underlined and broken, the place of the lungs on the Mount of Jupiter being marked with a broken branch of the heart, showing grave signs of consumption. The life line is short, and gives no promise of continuing its course, the fork on the line seems final. The heart, mentally speaking, shows a cold nature. It is very straight, and compared with the rest of the lines it was deep, which, with the long, slim thumb, will show him constant to the few he will care for. The curious bar-lines above, like a pair of crossed swords, are an uncommon example of the ring of Saturn, and mark one or two great and bitter disappointments in early life.

"There must have been at an earlier period, doubtless, many more lines in the hand than are shown here, but evidently they have faded with the greater lines of which traces still remain, but from the broken marks of the heart line and the fading of the life, I should conclude that at the time when the cast was taken the subject had come through a period of great suffering, and that the blurs on the head line would be the effect on the brain of some sort of drugs or opiates taken to relieve pain. I do not know if this was the case, but it is what I should read from the facts on the hand before me."

I am not a cheirologist, and must therefore take this very suggestive delineation of my subject in the spirit of the appreciative layman over the delicately technical work of an accomplished specialist. But the reader will find in it, I think, curious confirmation of much that has been said or suggested in the course of this narrative. The angle of view is different, but in the result there is little essential or intrinsic difference. To one point I may direct particular attention — the reference to drugs and opiates has perhaps a deeper significance than Mrs. St. Hill herself realised.

## SETTLED EXILE

When the final decision to make Samoa his permanent home was announced, certain of his friends, fearing the effects of such isolation, argued against

it with some warmth. Self-banishment to an outlandish island in the Pacific, they said, must cut him off from the big throbbing world of humanity, with fatal consequences to his work and reputation. Why should he thus jeopardise his career just when he was achieving popularity? His mood in response was the mood of Job with his counsellors. *Doubtless ye are the people and wisdom will die with you.* The counsels, he admitted, were well meant; but did his friends imagine he was exiling himself for fun, or to gratify a mere wanton whim? He might, indeed, go home, as some of them suggested; but if he did, it would only be to die. If he were to live, above all if he were to work, he must keep to the Pacific; and he had vital reasons both for living and for working. It must therefore be "the lone trial" or nothing. There was no choice of paths; surely they would understand that.

They did not understand, at all events immediately, any more than they had understood his desperate plight in the black days in California. It was, indeed, his misfortune, at more than one critical turn in his career, to be misunderstood by some who fancied they held the key to all his inmost thoughts, all his secret motives. And, lacking the gift of imaginative foresight, they did not perceive that the withdrawal they deprecated was to prove the happiest, most fruitful event of his entire career, that, instead

of isolating him, it was to give a mighty impetus to the world's interest in him and his works. Some people are amazed by his immense vogue, personal and literary; they may find at least a partial explanation in that self-exile which caught and held the public imagination as one of the most pathetically romantic adventures in the whole history of literature. External circumstances have much to do with an author's fortune; and in the final phase of his life Stevenson must be accounted the most fortunate writer of his time.

It may be said that Nature herself gave the stern admonition, pointed out the way for him. But there was more in it than that. Human motives are complex; when a driving vanity impels, they soar easily to the grandiose and the spectacular. Stevenson had been taken for a great white chief on his travels. What if he were to establish himself as a chief in reality, a sort of island nabob, with a barbaric splendour and a dusky retinue all his own? Samoa held at least a promise of that delightful consummation. Accordingly, in a spirit of high animation, he proceeded to take possession of his new estate in the primeval forest of Upolu. The date was late September, 1890.

## CHAPTER VII

### VAILIMA — THE JOYS OF CHIEFTAINSHIP

For the choice of his last home Stevenson had his own characteristic, whimsical motive. In some respects Honolulu or Tahiti would have suited him better; but he chose Samoa "for the simple and sufficient reason" that it was less civilised. It was "awful fun", he said. The fun may be taken *cum grano salis;* but to one who, Timon-like, affected to despise civilisation and all its hampering conventions, the simplicity and *naïveté* of unspoiled human nature were, it may be thought, irresistibly attractive. In any case, he must observe a decent regard for his own proclaimed love of the primitive and savage.

During his absence his agent, H. J. Moors, got some acres of forest cleared and a sort of improvised shed or "rough barrack" of two rooms built. That cramped structure, the work of native carpenters, Stevenson and his wife occupied for several months, with a German servant, and practically no furniture or other domestic comfort or convenience, till better accommodation should be available. The property

bought from a "blind Scots blacksmith" (how the vagrant Scot wanders!) stood six hundred feet up on the green slope of Mount Væa and three miles from the town or port of Apia, with an outlook over a sweep of tropical luxuriance upon the gleaming Pacific and within sound of its surf. It was a place of streams, hence the name Vai lima, contracted to a single word Vailima, which in Samoan bears the pretty meaning of Five Waters.[1] Since then the name, as the world knows, has become a household word, not only wherever the English language is spoken or understood, but wherever men and women take an intelligent interest in literature.

The "barrack", as later its more commodious successor, was built in a "deep cleft" overlooking a gorge, or more correctly on a platform or tiny plateau on the mountain-side embowered in forest. It is a far cry from the grey, cold metropolis of the North to that ultimate isle of Upolu in the midst of the resounding Pacific; but so far by devious unforseen ways had Destiny led to a home which, in the strictest sense, was to be permanent. Over yonder, across the measureless waste of waters, was the old land, with all its associations, bitter and sweet, now alike hallowed. It was a long, long journey thither, a journey which the new resident of Upolu was never

[1] Owing to changes in the configuration of the land the number of streams, I learn, is now reduced to two.

to undertake. Like those half-fabulous Celtic warriors, whose descendant he fondly imagined himself, it was his fate to go bravely forth but not to return. The lights of London, of Paris, of Edinburgh, the dim, always semi-befogged, lamps of Leith Walk and Lothian Street had shone on him for the last time. Quite other lights were now to be his — the light of a tropic sun by day, the light of a tropic moon and wondrous tropic stars by night — and those but for a little while. For here were both an end and a beginning; or, rather, here was the beginning of the end, the last lap in that strange, hot, flurried race for life, that headlong flight from the pursuing enemy. In the lone isle far from kith and kin, far from his "beloved dead", the wounded soldier was to make his last stand, wage his last grim fight. Henceforth we must figure Stevenson to ourselves as a man fighting with his back to the wall, all avenues of retreat or escape inexorably cut off.

He knew, and was not dismayed nor even dispirited. Life still held much that was sweet, precious, enchanting. For one thing, to make a habitable nest in the wilderness there was much to be done — clearing, fencing, planting, weeding, building, and he set about doing it with a zest that took no thought of the swift abbreviation of time. A new joy, a new ambition possessed him — such as his adored Sir Walter once knew. And as Scott planted with his

own hand the woods and designed the walls and keeps and turrets which were to glorify his name and perpetuate his family more effectively than the Waverley Novels, so Stevenson planned and worked upon his Pacific Abbotsford.

He laughed at himself occasionally for his folly; but it was "awful fun." That exquisite sense of fun carried him out alone into the bush with a finely ground cutlass to slash a path hither and thither in the jungly undergrowth, trip, get bruised and well stung by stinging plants, which have the virility and a good deal more than the venom of Scotch thistles. Nearer home he toiled like a navvy, with axe and hoe and hammer, as if to infect indolent Samoans with something of his own feverish zeal. It was equally good fun to stalk young pigs, catch and thrust them squealing into pens which he had himself helped to construct, or watch the pair of horses (beautiful dappled greys, imported from Auckland) break loose and stampede over the beds of lettuce, radish, onions, and sweet peas. At least, the excitement brought an agreeable variation of the sick-room routine and the nauseating eggnogg of Sydney. But the prime, the supreme pleasure was to direct and control the gangs of brown workmen engaged in "improving the estate." Ah! what it was to be a landed proprietor, to fell one's own trees, cultivate one's own soil, and be reverenced as a great chief by

a crowd of dependents. Sweet indeed were the joys of ownership.

Into the grand enterprise of home-making Mrs. Stevenson entered with at least equal spirit and perhaps greater practical efficacy; for while, despite all his zeal, *he* was somewhat out of his element, *she* was completely in hers. Nature, one might say, had fashioned her for just such a situation — that is, a situation requiring for its due management initiative, energy, decision, an unfailing hold on reality, and, above all, the invaluable faculty of making the best of things. The pioneer was in her blood; she came of a pioneering race, and not only maintained the family tradition, but added elements of her own. Her life had, in fact, been a series of pioneerings — often with frightfully exiguous means — and neither courage nor resource had ever failed her. What she had done in California she did now at Vailima on a more imposing scale. Her activity was incessant. She cooked and baked, raised flowers and vegetables; saw to live-stock — poultry, pigs, cows, and even horses; took a dominant part in superintending workmen, particularly in directing white carpenters at work on a new house, and arranging details with a woman's eye to external effect and internal convenience. Nor did she shirk her share of manual labour. In a blue overall and slouch hat, "with tucked-up skirts and bare feet", as she had been described to me by one

who often saw her at work, she weeded and planted in sunshine and rain with an absorbed eagerness that shamed even the phenomenal industry of the master.

All this indicates fervid enthusiasm; and in truth the enthusiasm in those early months was fervid. Tanned, tired, perspiring, often aching, but invincibly happy, the adventurers took hardships and discomfort with the ebullience of children rioting in the ecstasies of a new game. From Stevenson himself the ailments, the languor of Sydney fell away, as if they had never been. The note was no longer elegiac; if life were not exactly epic, it was at least enchantingly, wholesomely active. All those activities and enterprises brought an ever-increasing need of money. Even in the Pacific you cannot make a paradise without cash; and to augment funds Skerryvore was sold. The house had been Thomas Stevenson's gift to Fanny, and now Louis consented to the sale on condition that she should take Vailima in exchange.

From the fascinations of farming, felling, planting, building, and overseeing labourers, Stevenson had to turn to his "damned literature." The work thus profanely designated was that undertaken for the McClure Syndicate, the unlucky South Sea Letters which cost him so much vexatious labour, with results so entirely unsatisfactory. He was also toiling at "The Wrecker", manifestly with little inspiration; and to that time, too, belongs the "Beach of Falesa",

first called "The High Woods of Ulufanua", which as "Uma" appeared eighteen months later in the *Illustrated London News*. This story has been much praised and much condemned. Stevenson himself thought it good; "indeed, to be honest, very good." Its peculiar merit in his eyes was its realism. Other writers on the South Seas had lost themselves in mists of romance; he had held doggedly to the beaten path of fact. He did not deny that it might seem extravagant; but he avowed it was true.

I am informed by persons well acquainted with the scenes and people it depicts that the claim is justified, that, indeed, in no other of his South Sea writings did Stevenson get so close to living reality. That, I think, is certainly the impression it leaves on the mind of an attentive reader. To me it represents its author in one of his happiest, most vitally creative moments, a moment when the imagination, roused and touched to a peculiar intensity, seized upon fact and reproduced it with all the illumination of consummate art. Moreover, it has, what his stories too often lack, a refreshing smack of originality. It was not done from a model, for no model existed; it was a fresh, independent creation, or, if you like, a page of South Sea life torn, so to speak, from the raw and translated with extraordinary skill and vividness. Grave exception has been taken to its style; to me, I confess, its style is entirely admirable, since it is

the best conceivable for the subject and the narrator, as apt, in fact (other things apart), as the style of Burns in "The Jolly Beggars", that matchless rendering of unregenerate human nature. One does not write of South Sea traders and their moral eccentricities in the manner of Milton's "Paradise Lost", nor yet in the manner of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." If (within its limits) "The Beach of Falesa" is not a masterpiece, then it may be affirmed with some confidence that Stevenson never produced one. Here for once he dispensed with models, looked with his own unaided eyes, and the result is supremely admirable.

All the while he was intermittently writing and revising verse — "The Woodman", "Tropic Rain", and other pieces, by and by to appear in the volume "Songs of Travel." Of reading for pleasure he did little; but just then he read, strangely enough for the first time, "The Highland Widow", which he was "half inclined" to reckon Scott's masterpiece, though it is generally thought a failure. "Strange things are readers," was his meaning comment. And amid such varied and engrossing employments he found time and inclination to attend to the intellectual interests of his dependents. Some of them already called him "papa", an appellation of trust and affection which he interpreted in terms of paternal responsibility. He began instruction with gentle experiments on

Henry, a "Swaii Chiefling" who held the onerous post of ganger or squad foreman. Unlike the easy, lazy, pleasure-loving Samoans about him, Henry had an appetite for useful knowledge. To encourage it, his master fed him on decimals and English grammar as rudiments of the white man's culture. It was stiff fare for a child of nature; but it must be recorded as a compliment to teacher and pupil that for an hour daily the lessons in "long explessions", as Henry called English, were made part of the routine.

In solitary moments Stevenson found a more æsthetic pleasure in his flageolet. After sundown, when the strange birds on Mount Væa had ceased their shrill cries, its jerky, tootling strains often floated weirdly on the primeval silence. "Auld Lang Syne" must indeed have sounded odd in the forest solitudes of Upolu, though it had probably no suggestion whatever of "the horns of elfland faintly blowing." And there were other delights. Perhaps the most entrancing of them all came when, in the cool of the evening, husband and wife strolled over freshly made paths, inhaling ineffable fragrances as they viewed their possessions, their little Eden, embowered in forest. On Stevenson himself there was what his master, Walt Whitman, calls "the mania of owning things"; and behold, were not all things about him his own? There were also free sociable hours with Moors, pleasant, informative hours with

the missionaries, Mr. Clarke and Mr. Whitmee, with the American Consul, Mr. Sewall, the German Consul, Doctor Stuebel, and others. Interesting visitors also put into Apia — Henry Adams, the American historian, and Lafarge, the American artist — bringing a delicious breath from the outer world of literature and art.

One ominous portent there was. The cauldron of politics was beginning to seethe and boil over; and unhappily Stevenson fancied himself a politician when he was merely a man of letters with a conscience and a romantic instinct for the oppressed or losing side. But as yet he was not deeply involved and was able to devote himself to domestic affairs. Occasionally there were unpleasant interruptions. In her excessive ardour to subdue the forest and turn the jungle into smiling lawns, Mrs. Stevenson was apt to overtax her strength. She was also careless how she went about among drenched grass and underwood, or how she took risks under a tropical sun. Her indiscretions brought rheumatism, headache, earache, and once or twice yet more serious disorders which brought Stevenson hurrying at dead of night with mustard poultices, laudanum, and ginger. But they were trivial perturbations in a life of enchantment, a life which day by day grew richer in promise of good fortune and felicity.

Thus Stevenson passed his fortieth birthday, and

thus, for him, the year closed in what on the whole was serene weather, with fair horizons. He was in radiant spirits; and for once the radiance was genuine. I have said that we are to figure him as a man fighting with his back to the wall. Here I may seem to be contradicting myself. But the contradiction is seeming, not real. To the moralist, the student of human destiny and human vicissitude, the situation may suggest a cynical, catlike Fate indulging its victim with a momentary happiness, for sake of the contrast to come.

One trouble, alas! was chronic. For the glorious projects in hand money, and ever more money, was needed. The new house, the clearing, digging, felling, planting, ornamenting were cruelly expensive. It was delightful to play the chief and plutocrat, to direct gangs of workmen and behold one's estate emerging beautifully from the wilderness, a thing for pride, almost for adoration. But the cost was frightful; and the incomings were slow, uncertain, and all too meagre. With all his might Stevenson laboured at half a score of things, prose and verse. Yet the drained coffers ran lower and lower, threatened, indeed, to run dry. Since the cheques for the "Master of Ballantrae" no cash had come in, and on all sides costly obligations were piling up.

And then, for the moment at least, he was isolated, groping, fighting in the dark. At Vailima he poured

out his capital; but the sources of income were far off in New York and London, and, worse still, he neither controlled them nor knew what they were likely to yield, or when. The financial problem caused him moments of acute anxiety and depression. Yet even then he could smile as if he were hail-fellow-well-met with Fortune. Even a shortage of provender was a joke, or at worst an inevitable incident in pioneer life, and therefore to be taken with a gay countenance. Sometimes husband and wife dined on "one avocado pear" between them; sometimes the master's dinner ran to nothing better than bread and onions. Yet his only complaint was that such a larder made the entertainment of guests impossible. To make up, there were days and hours of feasting, with beef in plenty, new bread, baked bananas, and goblets of claret, when in truth they were, in Stevenson's own phrase, "belly-gods."

Meanwhile Mr. Lloyd Osbourne had settled affairs in England and was returning with Mrs. Thomas Stevenson. In January, after much debate and dubitation about leaving his wife alone, Stevenson went off on the *Lübeck* to meet them in Sydney, and enjoyed an exciting experience on the voyage. Off Fiji the *Lübeck* broke her shaft and seemed helpless; but by a clever bit of engineering and seamanship she was able to proceed, partly under steam, partly under sail, and reached her destination only three days late.

There had been fear of a delay of as many weeks. Again Sydney brought a relapse, "a smoking, hot little malady", as Stevenson told Charles Baxter, which resulted in forty-eight hours of semi-delirium. Helped on board for the return journey, he reached Vailima without further ill effect. But the place was still in too much confusion for his mother; and after a brief stay she returned to Sydney till the new house should be ready. In April she was back again, and thenceforth, save for one absence, was with her son to the end.

Her joy in the reunion was inexpressible. For his sake she had borne much, sacrificed much, and not least in giving up home and friends for that far exile in old age just to be with Lou. He was still Lou to her, still the child, the boy whose first lispings and prattlings she had fondly chronicled as with a prevision of his coming fame. And her faith, her adoring affection, were justified more splendidly than her dearest hope could have foreseen. Lou was famous. She was infinitely proud of him, proud of his success, won she knew how. Before her eyes, as it were, he had achieved the impossible, turned the absurdest dreams of his youth to reality. "I mean to be an author," said the small boy of six; and now the man of forty was a world-figure in literature. And she was his mother. His mother! There were moments when it was hard to realise that strange, thrilling,

almost incredible, dreamlike fact. On his part Stevenson had learned to value his noble-hearted mother; and it is pleasant to record that, when she became a member of his household, nothing that love and gratitude could suggest for her happiness was left undone. The tenderest, noblest passages in Stevenson's life are those connected with the mother who understood him so well, loved him so deeply, and in many a crisis stood by him with such devoted loyalty. With her came other additions to his family in his stepdaughter, Mrs. Austin Strong, and her son, who accompanied her from Sydney.

A month before their arrival he went off with Sewall, the American Consul, on a "malaga", or boating expedition, to Tutuila and others of the smaller, remoter Samoan group of islands. Before leaving Apia he had seen a dead man with women keening over him, much after the ancient Celtic fashion — Captain Hamilton, once American Consul; and the vision of the peacefully folded hands and serene, restful face haunted him even amid the distractions of new scenes and people. He envied the man "who had gone out of life's battle", a sad little touch of feeling significant of much. At Pago-Pago, the beautiful harbour of Tutuila, where he lived for some days in the house of a trader, he was immediately on the track of "copy." A few months earlier a sensational murder had been committed in the

place, and the event suggested a curdling story, "The Bloody Wedding", which for a time greatly excited him, as did so many of his abortive projects. But his real purpose was to collect material for his book on the South Seas. To that end there were various sailings to and fro, partly in a tiny schooner, partly in a whaleboat, and interviews (through an interpreter) with petty chiefs, fishermen, and indeed with any one, native or beach comber, who would be likely to yield an authentic touch of local colour. On April 13 he returned to Vailima, after a day and night in an open boat, an adventure which cost him several days of prostrating fever.

### SOUTH SEA STUDIES

Already in January his volume of "Ballads" was published by Messrs. Chatto and Windus; and in February "The South Seas; a Record of Three Cruises" began serially in *Black and White* (a weekly periodical long since defunct), with simultaneous publication in the United States. In regard to the "Record", all the author's worse forebodings were immediately realised. Disappointed readers asked in amazement: "What on earth has come over Robert Louis Stevenson that he gives us stuff like this?" Surely the man who wrote "Treasure Island", "Kidnapped", and so many charming essays, who was held up as a master and model of style, could not have

produced this dull hash which was neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring. He had gone off to realms of magic, and behold, what he wrote of them was totally devoid of all magic whatsoever. In some quarters there was an irrepressible disposition to gibe. "Ah! ha," cried a derisive chorus. "So this is your great stylist, your great writer; the genius who sits on the Olympian heights just a little above Shakespeare." At the same time the editor of *Black and White* was "snowed under" with letters from readers, some regretful, some angry, some fiercely sarcastic; but none laudatory. When it was discovered that several of the articles were held back because they were actually too tedious to be published, there was no surprise.

Perhaps in those ardent days we all expected too much. More moderate expectations would have produced a more lenient and therefore a fairer judgment. But a little clique of devoted Stevensonians had lately been extremely vocal concerning their idol's unmatchable merits and had aroused false hopes. In the result Stevenson suffered for the extravagance of his eulogists. They called him a supreme genius, the foremost stylist of the day; and here was stuff of which any second-rate journalist would be ashamed. In the shock of disappointment and the condemnation that followed, one important fact was forgotten — the author's purpose. To take note of that,

or at any rate to make some effort to ascertain it, is surely the first duty of criticism; yet how seldom it is performed!

It is much easier, of course, to say that "Paradise Lost" is not quite on the same plane as "Hamlet" than to fathom the intentions of its author. What did Vergil mean by the splendid episode of Dido in his great epic? — the best thing he ever wrote. Was it merely to leave the impression that his hero was a sneak and a cad, or that he was obeying behests that made him independent of human judgment? In recent times a great humorist wrote a serious book, and it was pronounced a failure because "Joan of Arc" is not as comic as "Huckleberry Finn." In writing the "South Seas", Stevenson did not set out to be sprightly or humorous or hauntingly imaginative, but simply to be true. And if truth in his case is found to be dull, the book nevertheless contains some excellent writing, as, for instance, in the brilliant character-sketch of Tembinoka, a little masterpiece of its kind. Further, if the impartial critic, dealing wholly with the question of intrinsic merit, weighs the work and finds it wanting, the general reader, whose interest is not critical, will in fairness remember the conditions in which it was produced. It was in the most literal sense a "pot-boiler." The "dibbs" which it brought were necessary; and Stevenson, bracing himself for an uncongenial task, did galley-

work to procure them. But it was the first and last contract of the kind he undertook.

Simultaneously he worked on "The Wrecker." That tale, as is well known, was only partially his. The plot, the skeleton, was Mr. Lloyd Osbourne's, the filling-in being a dual affair. With work done in collaboration the attempt to analyse it into component parts is always hazardous and seldom profitable. In "The Wrecker", however, perhaps because the fusion is imperfect, the marks of separate workmanship may be distinguished with comparative ease. Several of the most striking incidents and much of the character drawing are admittedly the work of Stevenson, although, indeed, to the student of his style and his history the admission is superfluous. The Paris chapters are wholly from his pen. The experiences described in them were his own experiences in the gay days before he knew the chastenings of care or the oppressive respectabilities of a family. The San Francisco scenes likewise bear his impress, as do also the characters of Loudon Dodd and Jim Pinkerton. The gory, sensational events at sea we owe to the lurid invention of Mr. Osbourne. To Henry James, Stevenson described the story as "machine-made"; but he was elated over the gruesome conclusion as "one of the most genuine butcheries in literature." Not till November was the "endless yarn" out of hand. He heaved an immense sigh of

relief as he dispatched the final portion to Burlingame for *Scribner's Magazine*, where it ran serially from August, 1891 to July, 1892.

On publication in book form it enjoyed an immediate popularity. Though the story was found rambling, confused, in parts absurd, in parts revolting, yet through all its queer twistings it was imbued with a certain wild buoyancy, an infectious zest for action, picturesque or horrible, as might happen. In no sense is it a masterpiece, even if the standard of comparison be Stevenson's own work at its best. It has not the compactness, the directness of "Treasure Island"; as little has it the felicity of "Kidnapped" or the moving, gripping power of the earlier sections of "The Master of Ballantrae."

But once the real action begins it is lively, bustling and plenteously spiced with sensation. Ruthless men perform ruthless deeds, the scuppers run with blood, and there is a general air of "hell let loose" which keeps the reader agreeably excited and engrossed. Pious Stevensonians have shaken their heads over its gore, its utter disregard for the Ten Commandments, forgetting that the author of "A Christmas Sermon" and "Vailima Prayers" had at times a gluttonous appetite for horrors and a lively feeling for characters far, far outside the pale of the Shorter Catechism. In the spring of 1891 "The Bottle Imp", an eminently successful tale of the South Seas, appeared in

two numbers of *Black and White* and was also translated into Samoan.

On getting rid of "The Wrecker", he announced his freedom with "a whoop of joy"; but in reality it was only freedom to engage in fresh work. For it was necessary to keep on grinding out "copy" to feed the insatiable maw of the devouring monster — finance. To *have* to write, to be blithe, amusing, charming, thrilling, to please careless readers and supercilious critics over yonder in America and England, when imagination seemed dead and inspiration was a mockery — that was his grim task. "The Courser of the sun harnessed to a dray." In our wisdom after the event we may blame Stevenson for the folly of squandering his resources, physical and intellectual, on four hundred acres of jungle and a dusky retinue on an island of the Pacific. And doubtless it was folly. Abbotsford killed Scott; and it is certain, I think, that Vailima, with its ever-increasing strain, did much to kill Stevenson. He did not shrink; at any rate he did not shirk. True, there were moments, many of them, when there came upon him a wistful longing for the simple life, say at Hyères; for in simplicity lay peace of mind and to peace of mind he was becoming a stranger, though externally he bore up with a brave show of happiness. Contrary to all that has been said of the glory and the felicity of Vailima, despite even a seeming improvement in

health, the lights were beginning to burn low. Once in a period of unrest and weariness, when writing to Charles Baxter, he quoted with significant meaning the pathetic words of Scott: "*No rest but in the grave for Sir Walter*," adding, "Oh! the words ring in a man's head."

Flagging energies told heavily on his work. One delightful book he was still to write, rather, however, as an aftermath of one that went before than as a new creation; and two others, one of them his supreme achievement, he was to drop in mid-course, broken fragments, suggesting all too pitifully what in happier circumstances he might have done. The rest, comparatively speaking, are nothing. But he planned and wrote, wrote and planned, with a dogged persistency which in the retrospect is infinitely sad. Had he been a little less anxiously diligent, less painfully eager, he had perhaps achieved more. But "needs must when the devil drives"; and the devil of necessity was driving Stevenson cruelly hard.

In the intervals of more exacting labour he read the diaries and letters of his grandfather, Robert Stevenson, whence by and by came the posthumously-published volume, "A Family of Engineers." At the same time he was sketching two new stories, which, as usual, roused him to much ardour — "The Shovels of Newton French" and "Sophia Scarlet." Neither was ever written. His immediate work was "A Footnote to History", the result partly of his

general studies of South Sea conditions, but more particularly an account, with pertinent comments, on current events in Samoa. The greater part of the book was written in the house of Mr. H. J. Moors and with the active assistance of Mr. Moors, who supplied much of the information.

### THE MIRE OF POLITICS

We touch here on old, unprofitable controversies and animosities which unhappily consumed much of Stevenson's time and energies. Compared with events which have since shaken the world, the whole Samoan trouble was a tempest in a teacup. But the principles of justice are not affected by the magnitude or pettiness of the interests involved. To a strict equity the poor man's one ewe lamb and the riches of a great empire are of equal importance. Stevenson's intervention in local affairs was not political but humanistic, though his actions took on a political colour. Civilisation vaunted itself as the uplifter and guardian of man; and lo! here it was treading him down, robbing him of his birthright, simply because it had guns and ammunition to blow his opposition into space, its ruthlessness with implements of destruction being made legal by a document concocted and signed in Berlin. The white man came in the shape of three great Powers, England, America, and Germany, to turn the natives into

pawns in a game that permitted neither protests nor interference. Stevenson was shocked and indignant. "So this," he said to himself, with a quickening of the pulses, "this is what my white brothers bring to civilise the heathen. It is iniquitous." With that feeling he wrote those impassioned letters to the *Times* and other newspapers which brought him into violent conflict with official opinion. To the seeker for adventure, the story-teller out for incident and atmosphere, there was all the exhilaration of danger; to the humanist all the intoxication of a losing cause. It was Charlie and his clansmen over again, in a new but equally picturesque setting.

The essential facts of the situation are simple. There were two rivals for the throne, or, rather, two puppets made rivals by the wire-pullers abroad. Malietoa Laupepa was first deposed by the Germans, then banished, then recalled and reinstated. His rival, Mataafa, a much abler and more popular man, had presumed to fight "the mailed fist" and had actually cut up a small German force in an early skirmish. That victory was his undoing. In his island pride he thought Germany was humbled to the dust and that he had but to dictate terms. On their side the Germans, smarting under such an affront from "a nigger", sang themselves a little "hymn of hate" against the day of reckoning. Mataafa was thus an enemy to be crushed.

Now Stevenson championed the cause of Mataafa, whom he described as "the nearest thing to a hero" in his history; and "a fine fellow" with the manners and attributes of a gentleman. Berlin, however, did not desire a gentleman, only a tool; and since Stevenson chose to range himself with the offending Mataafa he too was an object of hostility. To make the official wheels revolve, a Chief Justice and a "King's Adviser", who was also president of the Municipal Council, Conrad Cedercrantz, a Swede, and Baron Senfft von Pilsach, a German, were dispatched from Europe. When in 1891 those two arrived on the scene, discontent was seething, and, with a crass stupidity remarkable even in such functionaries, they proceeded to pile fat on the fire. Those four, two native princes, one of them an outlaw, and two despotic, obstinate, bungling foreigners, backed by the combined might of three great nations, formed the storm centre. Around the two white officials were grouped other officials — three consuls and three land commissioners — invested with powers which might be, and often were, arbitrary. Around the two contending chiefs gyrated more or less uncertainly the entire native population and many of the white people.

Stevenson, with his fiery impulses, his quick sympathies, his impetuosity, and, it must be added, his love of excitement, found it impossible to hold aloof.

The grossest wrongs were perpetrated under his eyes. He saw people arrested, imprisoned, deported, with the most cynical disregard of justice, and all his feelings flamed into anger. Ostensibly in the name of the white population, he took the lead in addressing certain awkward questions to the German baron; and was smartly snubbed. Looking down from the Olympian heights of authority, and very full of the insolence of office, the baron refused to recognise his right to speak for anybody. Thus baulked and insulted, Stevenson appealed to London in the letters above mentioned, with little enough satisfaction. A Foreign Office that had to consult a map to discover just where those troublesome Samoan islands lay was not likely to be deeply interested or impressed. Besides, it relied on its own consular reports, not on stray newspaper articles. And who was this Mr. Stevenson who wrote to the papers in the spirit of an irate taxpayer having a fling at the Government? A peripatetic writer of fiction meddling in delicate affairs of State! Preposterous.

A smart, blithely cynical under-secretary, overflowing with the superiorities of Eton and Oxford, plus a swelling sense of his own exalted functions, said quite emphatically it would not do. There would be a Blue Book some time soon, and such as desired enlightenment or guidance could get it there. People must understand that diplomatic questions

were managed according to old, well-defined diplomatic rules. And having delivered himself thus, the efficient under-secretary, it may be supposed, went off to luncheon, with a righteous sense of having put a fussy meddler in his place.

Stevenson, in fact, was "up against" a circumlocution office clad in the triple brass of a three-Power diplomacy. He might write eloquent letters, displaying every excellence of style, full of generous feeling and sound common sense; his appeals beat in vain on the securely encased official mind. In one thing, indeed, he succeeded — in getting himself classed as a nuisance to governing persons. As I have said, Germany in particular was savagely indignant with him. Who was he to say that might was not right, or deny that the strong had Divine sanction to do what they would with the weak? There was even a threat of expulsion from the scene of his pernicious activities. Perhaps that would awe him. They did not understand their man, the official mind being little distinguished for perspicacity or psychological acumen. They were wrong who fancied that he could be terrorised into silence and docility; they were equally wrong who fancied that official insolence could divert him from his purpose.

This attribute of greatness at least was conspicuously his — that, having once resolved, he knew not how to yield or turn back. We may regret his

grievous dissipation of energy. We think of the books he might have written had he held aloof from political agitation, and gone on unheedingly with his own work. We count those eruptions into Samoan politics a loss to mankind. Doubtless they are. Had he been like his own favourite, Sir Thomas Browne, who sat down amid the tumults of civil war and wrote his immortal "Religio Medici" and "Urn Burial" as composedly as if the whole world were steeped in tranquillity, then literature might be a little richer to-day.

But nothing in Stevenson's life is more truly characteristic, more vividly illuminative, than those incursions which the literary enthusiast deplores. They may for a moment obscure Stevenson the writer: assuredly they reveal Stevenson the man as few events of his career do. He envied Gordon both the felicity of his life and the glory of his death. To live so and die so were a happiness indeed. And here was his last grand opportunity to do something splendidly self-sacrificing for his fellow-men — men not of his race or colour — and he seized it with both hands. On second thoughts we should hesitate, I think, to blame him. The great battle for humanity is not so commonly, nor so hotly waged that we should censure the soldier who perhaps proves his courage at the expense of his prudence. At any rate, Stevenson did what he did precisely because he was Stevenson; and not Solomon or another.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A WAVERLEY HERO

Those external affairs, he said, hypnotised him, because he lacked the power of resistance. Yet other extremely essential affairs had to be carried on simultaneously, and he toiled with a grim determination, a desperate hope, scarcely surpassed by Carlyle in his darkest days. He was an early riser, finding, like other creative writers, that the imagination is at its best, its strongest, and freest in the morning hours. Breakfast, consisting of tea, bread, and a couple of eggs, was brought to him by his servant at half-past five, and by six he was usually at his desk or, as was more generally his habit, writing with a pad on his knee. At eight he allowed himself a short break, and at eleven a longer halt for early dinner, and, as often happened, a little recreation with the flageolet, or an occasional siesta. To make up for the early rising, he was in bed by half-past eight, or at latest by ten o'clock.

Sometimes in the afternoon he mounted his brown pony, Jack, a spirited animal bought from Mr. Moors for ten pounds, and rode down the steep, palm-shaded

way to Apia. But such excursions had to be cautiously made because of those hypnotic influences above mentioned. Generally, at any rate in the early days, he preferred the allurements of his estate and the laughing, merry gangs of brown workmen, pushing back the forest foot by foot. When tired writing or dictating, he would go out in a fury of enthusiasm to his weeding and clearing, slashing and tearing at recalcitrant roots till, as he said, his hands were in ribbons. More rarely he went off by himself to enjoy the solitude of his own forest and the music of streams and waterfalls. But he did so mostly with the conscience of a truant, and was soon back at his work.

His industry was the industry of one driven by sheer need; for there was "a hell of a want of money." The new house and its appurtenances, though built entirely of wood, which was plentiful, cost nearly £3,000, and though his earnings exceeded that amount by £1,000 per annum, the extra was swallowed up in collateral expenses. To meet such expenditure there was but one way — work, incessant work. In the final stage of "The Wrecker" and the Syndicate Letters, he produced 60,000 words in a month — "elephant's work", as he remarked. Yet it made him "sick to think of Scott turning out 'Guy Mannering' in three weeks." "Heavens!" he exclaimed enviously, "what thews and sinews!" He envied, too, the flexibility of mind which enabled

Scott to turn from one subject, one interest, to another with a brain that was ever fresh and nimble.

And, remote as he was, he had many interruptions. Apart from political distractions, visitors came in increasing numbers — white traders with dusky wives, missionaries, Roman Catholic and Protestant, petty chiefs, wandering sea captains, officers from the warship *Curacoa*, the latter especially welcome. Friends too were constantly dropping in — the bluff, plain-spoken, ever-helpful Moors, who aided and criticised with equal readiness; Mr. Carruthers, a local solicitor; Mr. Bazett Haggard, land commissioner and brother of the better-known novelist. Most notable and exciting, however, of all the visitors was Lady Jersey, wife of the Governor of New South Wales, who came with her brother, Captain Leigh, and her daughter, Lady Margaret Villiers. Lady Jersey has herself recorded how she and her party met Stevenson "either at the house of Mr. Haggard or in Mr. Stevenson's own delightful mountain home, and passed many hours in riding, walking, and conversation." But her experiences were not confined to those tame, conventional pleasures. Stevenson had a romantic scheme of his own for her entertainment, which he carried out with courage and address.

In a simmer of glee, doubt, and excitement, he conducted the party on a private and surreptitious visit to the rebel Mataafa in his camp at Melie,

several miles distant from Apia. "The wife of the Governor of New South Wales," relates Lady Jersey, "could not pay such a visit in her own name." Therefore she became Stevenson's cousin, "Amelia Balfour." To his own romantic imagination here was a chapter out of Scott; and he, "in velvet coat, cords, and yellow half-boots", a hero on an adventure both of gallantry and of danger. The enemy was furtively vigilant; but the expedition was carried out as gallantly as if the stage were set in Drury Lane. Nor was that all. In honour of the occasion Mataafa graciously conferred on his friend a new, indeed a unique, dignity.

A king can mak' a belted knight, a marquis, duke an' a' that —

but it is not every day he can exercise the Royal prerogative to the extent of elevating another to his own rank. During his first visit to Apia, Stevenson was introduced to a public meeting by the Reverend J. E. Newell as Tusitala, the Teller of Tales, a name by which he was thenceforth affectionately known among the natives. But he was also *Suenga*, Chief. Now at a stroke Mataafa advanced him to the regal honour of *Afioga*, Majesty. Miss Amelia Balfour, it was suspected, was a great white queen, and the shrewd suspicion doubtless suggested Stevenson's elevation. He was himself greatly amused and not a little flattered. "Mine has been a queer life," he

remarked, in reporting the incident to Mr. Colvin. But in that instance the queerness was delectable, even slightly heady.

In the social activities of the natives he took more than a Platonic interest; and, since the Samoans were extremely sociable when they were not burnishing their arms for war, they made much of him. As an honoured guest he attended balls and other social functions; and on several occasions gave balls himself which were described in the local newspaper as models of lavish hospitality. Through all, too, ran the thrilling consciousness that at any moment the war-drum might sound, making the woods and valleys of Upolu alive with armed men. "This is one of the finest places on earth," an Irish visitor is reported to have observed gleefully. "You can have a fresh conspiracy every day." The air, indeed, was thick with conspiracy, with threats and rumours of bloodshed. Stevenson suffered some uneasiness from the fact that his house could not easily be turned into a garrison of defence; could, indeed, be fired like matchwood. Nevertheless, as a precaution he laid in a sufficient supply of Colt revolvers and ammunition to arm his family in case of need — a circumstance which drew on him the suspicion of his enemies. Thus the *Samoa Times*, which Stevenson averred was bought by the opposition out of public funds, made a violent attack on him as a person

who was secretly fomenting sedition and rebellion. More than once the situation became tense; and the enemy seemed to score when, with vindictive glee, it quoted a paragraph from a German paper suggesting "the complete disarming of the whites who meddle in internal affairs, *including Mr. R. L. Stevenson, the novelist.*"[1]

Possibly to soothe his nerves in the midst of such turmoil, he undertook to teach his "step-grandson" French and mathematics. At the same time he took up on his own account the study of the Samoan language, first with a half-caste clerk employed by his friend Moors, and afterwards, more scientifically, with the Reverend S. J. Whitmee, who has given an interesting account of his relations with his distinguished pupil. It will be remembered that Stevenson similarly "took up" the study of Gaelic and Spanish, without making much progress in either. With Samoan he appears to have been more successful. According to Mr. Whitmee, he was able both to read and write it with considerable fluency.

### "CATRIONA" — STEVENSON'S HIGHLANDERS

One grave disadvantage of his isolation was a scarcity, almost a famine, of books. For such works as he desired, or could be sent, he was dependent on the good offices of his friends in England and the

[1] The *Vossiche Zeitung.*

States. Of contemporary literature he read comparatively little; but all new books by Meredith and Henry James were sent to him as they appeared, and he was especially attracted by the early Sherlock Holmes series of Sir A. Conan Doyle and the short stories of Mr. Rudyard Kipling, whom he modestly regarded as the most promising newcomer, "ahem! — since I appeared." He read Renan's "Origines", which he found "devilishly interesting", though he thought the method "sheer lunacy." Over another French book he went "crazy" — Paul Bourget's "Sensations d'Italie." So enchanted was he that he forthwith dedicated his volume "Across the Plains" to the new idol.

The book appeared in April, 1892, with the imprint of Messrs. Chatto and Windus, and a copy was sent to Bourget. Stevenson waited in a fever of eagerness for the response; and was "surprised into apoplexy" when the idol proved as dumb and indifferent as any graven image of old. In the reaction of disgust he asked bitterly if the French, his old admired friends, the French were not a polite race; or if a flattering dedication was not worth a letter of acknowledgment. Since no letter came, his ecstasies speedily abated, and he cared no more for Le Sieur Bourget and his incomparable production. So do enthusiasms wax and wane. One other book he read with profound and peculiar interest in the

summer of 1892 — a new volume of poems by W. E. Henley. He was full of generous admiration. To Charles Baxter he wrote of Henley: "There is no more genuine poet living"; and to Henley himself he wrote a brief note which, in spite of all differences and disagreements, must have made the recipient's heart glow.

He was, as usual, brimful of new schemes, and each scheme was a masterpiece in embryo. It is a condition of successful creative work that in its first flashing conception the imagination should be more or less in a frenzy of ardour and optimism, that, in fact, its geese should be all swans. Certainly Stevenson's goslings were very frankly cygnets. "Sophia Scarlet" and "The Shovels of Newton French" have already been mentioned. With another, "The Young Chevalier", first named "Blair of Balmyle", he made an actual and brilliant start. Here he was on his native heath; for the setting and characters were to be Scots with a leaven of French. What he wrote of the story was so good, so strong and vivid, his admirers must always regret that it was left a tantalising fragment.

But at the stage we have reached his grand, his absorbing passion was "David Balfour", known in England as "Catriona." It will be remembered that when he finished "Kidnapped", or rather ended abruptly without finishing it, he had on hand a large

quantity of what editors call "overmatter." In a letter written from Bournemouth to his father, he explained how he meant to use it in a sequel; and he thought, as proved to be the case, that the second part of David Balfour's story would involve comparatively little labour. The amazing thing is that, with such admirable material in his possession, its use should have been so long delayed. And the amazement is increased when we consider his literary course in the interval. Between "Kidnapped" and "Catriona" there lies a long stretch of work so poor that to-day it would be utterly forgotten but for the saving fact that it appears under his name.

In strict accuracy, the period between "Kidnapped" in 1886 and "Catriona" in 1893 (to take the dates of publication) contains but one really notable success: and even that is partial — the first half of "The Master of Ballantrae." For reasons often mistakenly ascribed to health alone, he went off on those panoramic excursions into the South Seas which were so full of promise and so sadly disappointing in result. Through all that period the artisan was strenuously at work; but the artist for the most part was in abeyance. The volumes "In the South Seas" and "A Footnote to History" contain much curious information, and here and there are lighted up by gleams of imagination; there are also passages of remarkable vigour; but the total

effect is something over which the most ardent Stevensonian yawns in spite of himself.

With "Catriona" it was wholly different; for there Stevenson found himself afresh after many wanderings. The "tropics vanished" and he was once again among familiar scenes, to the fond, retrospective imagination, all the more familiar because in reality so remote. The blended scents of heather and peat were once more in his nostrils; his face was wet with the cold, delicious spray of Northern seas, and his heart leaped within him as he re-explored, in beating excitement, favourite nooks and by-paths in his beloved East Lothian. It was home — in an eternal exile. Moreover, in all his moving adventures he was with old friends — David Balfour and Alan Breck, the two characters in all his varied gallery he knew best.

The effect was a quickening of the pulses, a joyous renewal of youth and animation. Style and characterisation brightened, as they brighten when the imagination works eagerly and easily in an element of its own choice. In the Pacific he fought, so to speak, with wild beasts at Ephesus; now he was happy among kin and comrades. In consequence his tale flowed with unaccustomed rapidity; the book was, in fact, the most quickly written of all his longer narratives, the actual writing occupying him, not too strenuously, for four months. In his own opinion, he

had touched yet another high-water mark. Like most authors, he had many high-water marks, the latest being always the highest.

Under the title of "David Balfour" the story ran serially in *Atalanta*, a magazine for girls, long since dead, from January to May, 1893, and was published by Messrs. Cassell and Company in the following September. In serial form it was not a success. The editor complained to me, in tones of emphatic disgust, that, instead of increasing the circulation of the magazine, as was hoped and expected from the price paid, its effect was the exact reverse, and he was bombarded by letters from his readers begging him to "stop this stuff" and give them "something with a little more grip in it." His own editorial opinion was that it was "one of the thinnest stories" he had ever read. In book form its reception by the Press and public was appreciative without being at all effusive. But such masters and judges of the literary craft as Henry James and Bret Harte were fervent in their admiration. James was jubilant, and the author of "M'liss" found it "simply delightful" — a judgment in which a multitude of readers have agreed.

It was complained that the early part of David Balfour's story suffered from a lack of feminine interest. Possibly with that complaint in his mind, Stevenson, in the second part, introduced a heroine,

or more properly two heroines, Catriona and Barbara Grant. Catriona represents the ideal, her creator's ideal, of innocent, spirited, unspoiled Highland womanhood; while the volatile, over-vivacious Barbara represents his conception of the capricious, incalculable feminine, slightly sophisticated by eighteenth-century Edinburgh society. Between them stands David Balfour, a Lowland dolt, awkward, tongue-tied, conventionally clumsy, his clumsiness being emphasised for no better reason, one suspects, than that the novelist was greatly in need of a contrast. James Mohr (Big James), Catriona's father, is a sort of foil to his daughter, illustrating the darker, fiercer, less admirable qualities of the Gael. But from the moment he appears on the brig in "Kidnapped", the real protagonist, the star of the piece, is the redoubtable Alan Breck. His appearance has, indeed, much the same effect as the appearance of Sam Weller in the "Pickwick Papers", that is, he vitalises the whole story, makes it vivid and keeps it moving.

Considered as a piece of construction, "Catriona" is rather a series of episodes than an organic whole. In unity, as in vitality, it stands on a lower plane than "Kidnapped" or even "Treasure Island." Its feminine interest does not greatly aid, because it is too patently experimental. Stevenson's women, it may be said once for all, have nowhere the arresting, compelling personality which makes the women of

the great masters, the magicians of the creative imagination, often seem more real, more intensely alive, than their sisters of actual flesh and blood. Barbara Grant, for instance, sparkles and scintillates with most engaging airiness and spirit; but the secrets of her being, the underlying complexities of thought, emotion, and motive which really actuate her behaviour, remain unrevealed. Catriona, notwithstanding her prominence in the story, is even more of a surface character. In delineating her, Stevenson found her dialect hard to manage and wished he knew Gaelic. She apes very prettily the speech, manners, and emotions of a Highland maiden flung into the maelstrom of misfortune; but she remains dim, for the obvious reason that at heart she was dim to her creator; and in essence she is not Highland.

Neither, for all the praise lavished upon him as the incarnation of a race, is the best Highlander in fiction (a nonsensical claim) Alan Breck. In the course of his researches Stevenson discovered that the conventional or stage Highlander is vain, proud, touchy, quick to sniff affronts, and quicker still to avenge them. Therefore the theatrical, swashbuckling Alan must be endowed with vanity, pride, touchiness, and an overweening aptitude for picking quarrels. But with him also the deeper, finer traits and qualities remain undisclosed. The reserves of

sentiment, the depth, intensity, and delicacy, the timidity and shyness, so strangely and intimately blended with burning ardours and headlong audacities, which distinguish the Highland character — all these were beyond the ken, or at any rate beyond the reach, of Stevenson. Once, in a critical moment, he remarked that Scott never knew the Highlands, that he was ineradicably a Borderer. If it is true that even Scott has not fathomed the deeper, finer shades of Highland character, it is doubly, trebly true of Stevenson himself. And there is another thing. To me it is obvious that, were there no Rob Roy in fiction, there would be no Alan Breck; though it must be added that in the composition of "honest Alan" there is a strong dash of the Gasçons of Dumas. Originality is nowhere the characteristic note of Stevenson, either in character or incident.

A peculiar and pathetic interest clings to "Catriona." It was the last complete book that came from the hand of Stevenson; for "The Ebb Tide", which followed a few months later, was at least as much Mr. Lloyd Osbourne's as his. In leaving "Catriona" behind, therefore, we pass into the looming shadow of the end. Night and the Inn, where the weary traveller is to take his rest, are not far off. Yonder, but a little way in front, towers the lonely summit of Mount Væa, soon to be hallowed ground. What now remains of the amazing, eventful journey

is lined, not by stately finished works of art, but by broken columns. As he well knew, Stevenson had gone into far lands to die. "I shall not even return like Scott for the last scene," he wrote to Craibe Angus, in connection with a Burns Exhibition at Glasgow. Burns Exhibitions, with so much else not to be put into words, were to him for ever over. "They pass away, these years of time, my brother: their months are reduced to weeks, their weeks to days; their days to hours and their hours to moments, which latter alone we possess, and those only as they fleet."

Earlier in the year — in February, to be exact — he went off with his wife and step-daughter for a brief holiday to Sydney, his last visit. The colder climate brought a touch of pleurisy, fortunately not serious. Otherwise there was much to cheer and inspirit. Since his former visit his reputation had grown, that is to say, had travelled from London to New South Wales. He was now a personage, a literary lion whom intellectual and artistic Sydney delighted to honour. As the guest of an art club he repeated for one glorious hour the Bohemian delights of Barbizon and Grez. In art circles he became the intimate friend of Mr. Julian Ashton, "the grand old man of the art world of Sydney." Once Mr. Ashton, calling on him, found him in bed, with an armful of books. He was reading, as Mr. Ashton reports, "a

blue-covered volume, which he tossed to me, remarking, 'That's damn good stuff by a new writer, and with a name like that he should go far.'" The good stuff was one of Wheeler's Indian volumes by Rudyard Kipling.

Stevenson was also the guest of the General Presbyterian Assembly, where he gave an address on missions, and in serio-comic vein some reminiscences of his ancestral connection with the Church. He was invited to Government House, but, I am informed, refused the invitation "unless he could wear his favourite white suit — generally worn with a red cummerbund." To Press men he gave further views on literature, on reading, on the literary craft, and with some vehemence on Samoan politics. One of his notable experiences was a meeting at Auckland with Sir George Grey, then at the height of his reputation as the "great pro-Consul" of the Southern Hemisphere. Among others of whom he saw a great deal was Mr. H. B. Wise, a well-known public man of Sydney.

### THE THROB OF THE WAR-DRUM

He returned to work but not to peace. Every day there were flying reports of sudden war, with appalling atrocities; every night the household at Vailima expected to be in a state of siege. Workmen were excitedly decorating themselves in war-paint,

and Mrs. Stevenson was warned that the Samoan warrior on the trail for heads was a devil incarnate. At the same time Stevenson himself was suspect, so much suspect, indeed, that by order of Chief Justice Cedercrantz his letters were stopped and opened, in hope of securing a conviction for treason. Moreover, there were sinister attempts to get at him through his own servants; and once at least the effect was comic.

A half-caste whom he had sometimes employed as an interpreter was suddenly arrested and charged with being a spy for Mataafa. Stevenson leaped to the conclusion, probably a correct one, that this was an underhand attempt to implicate him. According to Mr. H. J. Moors, his agitation was extreme and painful. He was sure, he said, to be called as witness, and once in the box he might commit himself. "I don't know what I'll be saying if once I start talking," he remarked dolefully. The risk was cleverly averted. In the island there were but two solicitors; both were promptly engaged for the defence; and Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, "Advocate of the Scots Bar", was briefed on the same side. The case for the prosecution collapsed and the situation was saved — though Stevenson was too agitated even to make an appearance in court.

The enemy, however, was neither silenced nor defeated. There were fresh demands for Stevenson's

deportation, and the story goes that plans were actually laid for kidnapping him, like his own David Balfour. No serious attempt, however, was made. But the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific was induced to issue a "Queen's Regulation" for "the maintenance of peace and good order in Samoa", an ordinance which Stevenson at once took as another sinister attempt on his liberty. Comments in the British Press and questions in the House of Commons followed — in a tone of some asperity. Fortunately, the Colonial Secretary, Lord Ripon, a good-natured man of large common sense, intervened; the offensive order was cut down, and local autocrats and would-be dictators were instructed to abate their "opposition to Mr. R. L. Stevenson."

A further triumph was the dismissal of Cedercrantz and Pilsach. The struggle had been bitter, and on the official side had been conducted not only with personal rancour, but in violation of every code of honour. Yet in the hour of victory Stevenson evinced no disposition to gloat. "There was no man born with so little animosity as I," he said of himself with perfect truth. He was the last man in the world to descend to the meanness of kicking a fallen enemy. When all was over, he even expressed a certain affection and admiration for his defeated opponent. Not every victor in "the vile game of politics" is so generous.

Meanwhile discontent, verging on rebellion, continued to simmer and splutter among the natives. To white observers it was plain that an outbreak could not be long delayed; and suddenly the charged elements flared and thundered. Warriors hideously streaked, and drunk with the lust of blood, infested the bush by day, and at night stole furtively across the lawn at Vailima, their savage weapons gleaming with ghastly suggestiveness in the moonlight. Mataafa's men clamoured for the heads of the men of Malietoa, and against the better judgment of their chief went out to take them. A good many heads were, in fact, taken, several of them, to Stevenson's horror and disgust, the heads of women. Yet his sympathies were red hot with the rebels. In the first wild excitement he even visited Mataafa's lines and returned delirious with the passion of war. There was nothing else on earth so glorious, nothing that sent the blood surging and racing in such maddening exhilaration — a sentiment which will bring a smile to the faces of men of a later day who have endured the agonies, the terrors and hardships of real warfare.

Unhappily, in the first shock Mataafa was beaten, and his defeat was made decisive by British and German warships. Against the forces of the dummy king, Malietoa, he might hope that superior valour and strategy would in the end win; but with European

shells from European naval guns he could not cope. He surrendered and was banished to Jaluit, one of the Marshall group of islands, while his followers were plundered and imprisoned. Great was the disappointment of Stevenson. For Mataafa he had a genuine admiration and even affection; and on his side Mataafa's regard was a profound reverence. Years after Stevenson was gone, he paid a noble and touching tribute to the memory of his friend Tusitala, the Great White Chief Tusitala, the man of wise counsel and steadfast friendship.

### THE GREAT WHITE CHIEF

These things concern us to-day, not at all because of their intrinsic importance — relatively they are insignificant — but wholly because Stevenson was involved in them, and they were therefore to a certain extent part of his life and work. Perhaps his energies might have been given more profitably to other things. Had he calmly or callously shut his eyes and stopped his ears in that imbroglio of intrigue and mismanagement, he might have written more. But he would not be the Stevenson we know — the impulsive, impetuous, often quixotic enthusiast, the fiery enemy of injustice, the chivalrous champion of weak causes and oppressed peoples. Those events in fact reveal him as in a mirror; and if the author is overshadowed, the man stands forth with an added

lustre and impressiveness. Let us not too much regret his turning-aside.

In material things his fortune was steadily in the ascendant. At last, after many difficulties and much heavy expenditure, his new house was complete, and according to Apia standards was a marvel of magnificence. To critical or unfriendly eyes it might, and did, seem "a ramshackle wooden bungalow" devoid of "barbaric" or any other splendour. But to wonderstruck natives it was the acme of human grandeur, an incontestable proof of the Great White Chief's boundless opulence. Was not Tusitala, also *le ona*, the man of great possessions. He came, and behold this wonder, the like of which had never been seen before in the islands. By comparison kings' houses were mean, a truth, indeed, easily demonstrable in those regions.

Nor was the wonderful green palace all. Everywhere were signal marks of the same abounding wealth. Gangs of workmen, mostly wearing Roman Catholic medals slung about their necks (the Roman faith being the popular one), were busily engaged extending gardens and lawns, laying out tennis courts, making and remaking roads, turning the heart of the obdurate forest into a smiling oasis. Truly it was great magic, and denoted great riches. The road-making was but an indifferent success. To the end the heights of Vailima were too difficult for

wheeled vehicles, transport being wholly by pack-horses. But the more primitive, the more picturesque and romantic. Internally the house seemed a nest of luxury, with its queer assortment of china and Sheraton furniture from Skerryvore, and solid mahogany and horsehair from Number 17 Heriot Row, its pictures, books, silverware, ornaments, and general air of civilised grandeur.

A distinguished traveller and public servant who knew Samoa well, and was a frequent guest at Vailima in those latter days, has kindly given me his recollections of the house and surroundings.

On the ground floor of the last and most imposing addition to the residence you entered a spacious apartment capable of accommodating a hundred or more people. This was used as both reception room and banqueting hall, when Stevenson, in the rôle of chieftain, entertained his fellow-chiefs, his friends and retainers. The feasts were planned on a lavish scale, and as far as possible according to Samoan fashion — pigs roasted whole, pickled pork, beef in generous quantities, fowls, fish, fruit in piles, with bowls of kava, a sort of native beer made from the kava root and prescribed by immemorial usage at all ceremonial gatherings. There was always, moreover, a very fair cellar in the European style. With the native guests it was always a point of honour to clear the tables, or more correctly the floor, since in

eating and drinking they squatted on mats. As a further concession to local custom, banana leaves were often used for plates and fingers nearly always as knives and forks.

What was not consumed was carefully gathered up and carried away. But this is not to be set down to greed, for in such matters the Samoan is, or was, a gentleman of very delicate honour, and for every gift taken he was punctilious in giving another in return. The room was ceiled and panelled with Californian redwood, and a broad, handsome staircase of the same material led to the rooms above. A portrait of Stevenson's father, by Sir George Reid, the celebrated Scottish painter, faced the visitor on entering, and a marble bust of his grandfather, Robert Stevenson, the lighthouse-builder, looked down from its pedestal in a corner, with a certain grim Scots complacency. Little the original could have dreamed what strange scenes the marble eyes of his counterfeit presentment were destined to behold. Off the great hall were the living rooms, with a special room for Stevenson's mother; and above were the bedrooms and library. Off this, again, was a tiny room, mere box with a deal table and a narrow bed, where for the sake of quiet Stevenson worked and slept. Grouped outside were quarters in native style for the large retinue of servants.

The library was not on an extensive scale. For

obvious reasons, the owner had to be severely eclectic; and many books which in normal circumstances would have found a place on its shelves were absent. It was richest in works of travel, particularly in works dealing with the Pacific. Of French fiction there was a fair collection, comprising sets of Balzac, Dumas, Hugo, and several novels by Daudet and other later writers, including his *bête noire*, Zola. In English fiction the place of honour was assigned to Meredith and Henry James, and hard by were the Waverley Novels. There was also a sprinkling of miscellaneous modern novelists. History was poorly represented; but Memoirs and Chronicles likely to be useful to the novelist in his own work were numerous. The Greek classics were represented by the bald but invaluable Bohn; some of the plays of Sophocles were also included in the translation of Lewis Campbell. Horace in his native tongue was a well-thumbed favourite; and a little lower in use and favour stood Martial.

On the value of a knowledge of Latin, Stevenson more than once grew eloquent. In his own case, as he told a Sydney interviewer, the benefit was "inconceivable." Latin, he said, helped one to "arrive at the value of words." Again, "the Latin language is so extraordinarily different from our own, and is capable of suggesting such extraordinary and enchanting effects, that it gives a man spurs and

wings to his fancy." It does this, of course, by means of Horace's *Collida iunctura*, the artistic arrangement and juxtaposition of words, a device which would naturally appeal to Stevenson. Yet his own style bears little trace of real Latin influences. Newman, according to his own confession, got his style from Cicero; but there is little that is Ciceronian in the style of Stevenson, and still less that is Tacitean, though here and there he may seem to borrow something of the pictorial manner of Livy. The borrowing, however, is rather seeming than real; and for Livy we may substitute Sir Thomas Browne. The balance, the studied antithesis of Latinised writers, like Pope in verse and Johnson in prose, are wholly absent in Stevenson. He is seldom epigrammatic, his talent being rather for pretty, graceful fluency than for point or pungency.

The library, then, was not large, yet it was eminently characteristic. Notwithstanding his devotion to books and his zeal for literary masterpieces, he was never what is called an omnivorous reader. No man, not even the most ardently acquisitive man of letters, can take all literature for his province. In the prodigious conquests of the Carlyles and Macaulays, the men who read with miraculous speed and remembered with miraculous tenacity, there are large blank spaces. Inevitably so, in view of the brevity of human life and the meagreness of human faculty.

But even in his own department Stevenson does not appear a deeply, widely read man. He had neither the amplitude, the varied and curious knowledge of Scott, nor the keen, questing scholarly instinct of Meredith. All his life he was rather the devoted adherent of a few favourites than the roving, discursive lover of a multitude, a circumstance due, probably, to his inveterate, too-long-continued habit of imitation.

A man, said Dr. Johnson, in his pleasantly-emphatic way, should have his reading done by five-and-twenty, the implication being that if delayed till later it will not be done at all. Certainly, at Vailima, Stevenson had little leisure for any reading save what was directly essential for his own work. For one thing, the duties and responsibilities of a patriarchal position were becoming more and more exacting. He was, as he said, not without a touch of pride, the head of a small clan, a clan that ultimately reached an aggregate of a hundred or more. Being natives, its members were, as a rule, good-natured as they were lazy. Nevertheless, among themselves frequent disputes arose, and Stevenson had to intervene in the dual capacity of master and judge. He enjoyed the double function, bearing himself with as high and impressive an air of judicial power as if he were visibly clothed in the ermine and horsehair of constituted authority.

Usually his efforts as arbiter and peacemaker were

completely successful. Hence, while others had difficulty in getting and keeping servants, his rarely left him from any cause of dissatisfaction. I am informed, by one who had particular opportunities to observe the facts, that in the selection of household servants Stevenson took a direct personal interest, and that they always included half a score of the most attractive native girls in the island. Indeed, among the white population the female staff at Vailima was somewhat profanely known as "Stevenson's harem" and was the subject of some ribald jesting.

His position involved other responsibilities which to a man of his tastes and temperament, one may suppose, were at times a trifle irksome. Though devoid of any real moral sense, any hampering respect for the Decalogue, the Samoans observed the rites and ceremonies of religion, not only with meticulous care, but even with ostentatious gusto. They went dutifully to church or mission, the women suffering martyrdom in tightly laced corsets (which they discarded at the first chance), but gay in silk stockings and flamboyant hats, often made of bark and dyed to rival the rainbow; the men each in spotless *lavalava*, a sort of rude native kilt, and white shirt worn loose and flowing like a surplice. They sang like cherubs in the choir, were prompt with the responses, and showed an avidity, which would shame British and American Sunday-school scholars, in com-

mitting the Scriptures (in Samoan) to memory. In a word, they were living testimony to the zeal and success of their teachers, the nuns and missionaries who pointed, not without reason, to the religious fervour of the simple-minded islanders.

Nor was the devotion all Pharisee-like for public places. In Samoan families prayers were part of the daily routine, or, rather, an act of decency which it was disgraceful to omit. On the principle, therefore, of doing in Rome as the Romans do, Stevenson not only conformed to local custom, but was so punctilious in observance that he put off Sunday visits in deference to native sentiment.

The White Chief, the head of a clan, must set an example; and he did, though, as he confessed, the daily exercise soon became too much for him. On his mother's arrival at Vailima family worship was held twice a day, morning and evening, then once a day, and finally once a week, on Sunday evenings. The company assembled in the large hall, and the chief part of the service were the prayers composed by Stevenson himself.

# CHAPTER IX

## "VAILIMA PRAYERS"

Those celebrated "Vailima Prayers" have been the theme of much admiration and not a little controversy. On one side their religious fervour and exalted spirituality have been taken as incontestable proof of what, in theological language, is called a change of heart. The sinner has repented and has returned to the fold, confessing his sins, humbling himself, seeking Divine aid and guidance. On the other it is affirmed, with equal assurance, that the prayers, so pleasing to the elect, are the utterances of a patent insincerity, a cloak ostentatiously worn as a sop to convention.

Such modes of argument imply that a man must either be impeccably virtuous or radically, incurably impious. In either case, there is surely a gross error in reading or interpreting human nature. Since the dawn of history, humanity and fallibility have gone together. The man after God's own heart sent the unfortunate Uriah to his death from the most abominable of motives; yet the prayers and psalms of David are not generally regarded as hypocritical.

There is no incongruity in the "Vailima Prayers", any more than there is incongruity in the outpourings of saints who were often so appealingly, pathetically human. The man who wrote "Jekyll and Hyde" and "Lay Morals" could write prayers without any insincerity, any contradiction of his essential nature. To some who saw a good deal of him in Samoa, Stevenson was the very pattern of purity and piety; to others, who saw him at least as much and as intimately, he was the free-and-easy Bohemian, with an unmistakable dash of the sensualist, the libertine; and both were right according to their lights. They contradict each other because their views of the man they judged were partial and imperfect, because, in a word, their vision was defective. One imagines with what scornful joy Stevenson himself would have enlightened and corrected them.

In my opinion the "Vailima Prayers" have no taint of hypocrisy, however sharply they appear at variance with some incidents of conduct. Which of us is granted grace to live up to the full spirit of our prayers? If there is anything insincere in Stevenson's prayers, it lies in their ornateness, for at times their author seems to be presenting the Deity with specimens of his literary skill. But then, again, literary skill was second nature to him, and as natural, almost, as his own skin. The charge of hypocrisy may therefore be dismissed. But we are not, therefore, to

conclude that conduct was an undeviating progress along a sub-celestial highway of goodness and virtue. Stevenson was no Pharisee; but equally he was no saint, except in the haloed caricatures of his idolators.

Like most reflective, and all sensitive, imaginative souls, he had in those latter years moments of rapt brooding on human destiny, on the unspeakable mystery of the infinite and man's piteous need of a Power greater than himself. One might say that the gloom of Thomas Stevenson at times overshadowed Vailima, and that as the father had been so was the son. Certainly he had got completely away from the shallow "schoolboy blasphemies" which had once won him so much applause and so much opprobrium. The prayerful moods were intermittent, for man is not always of one mind or one texture. As Stevenson himself pertinently observes in his early essay on Pepys, we instinctively adapt ourselves to circumstances. "We are merry with one, grave with another, as befits the nature and demand of the relation. . . . For man, being a Protean animal, swiftly shares and changes with his company and surroundings; and these changes are the better part of his education in the world."

By being all things to all men — religious with missionaries, worldly with men of the world, Bohemian with Bohemians — Stevenson, like versatile

natures in general, too easily gave an impression of inconsistency. The dull, the stupid, alone enjoy the felicity of being always and everywhere consistent: and Stevenson was neither dull nor stupid.

As an offshoot, or extension, of those domestic exercises he turned his attention to mission Sunday schools, and actually undertook to teach a class, an enterprise not, perhaps, without its touch of satire. The effort proved disillusioning. To interest his scholars he was obliged to resort to bribery, beginning with the lure of sixpence and gradually rising to half a crown. But even that bait failed to evoke any marked enthusiasm. "I don't know what you mean," said an astute Irishman under similar temptation, "and if I did it is n't enough." Stevenson's bribe was not enough for the cupidity of the juvenile Samoans, who evidently had just civilisation enough to expect a double profit from religion. Besides, the work was tedious; there were interruptions from illness, and, deciding that he was not a Heaven-born Sunday-school teacher, Stevenson retired abruptly.

### VAILIMA SPLENDOURS

Socially life flowed pleasantly into ever-expanding channels. Cedercrantz and Pilsach were gone, leaving only a muddle and memories none too fragrant. With the new Chief Justice, C. J. Ide, a genial, efficient American, Stevenson was soon on terms of

intimate friendship, made the more agreeable by familiar family intercourse. His status as a chief, a person of soaring importance, was recognised by an ever-widening circle; and he cultivated his semi-feudal prestige with undisguised relish. It was costly, but it must be maintained. Vailima ranked as the "show place" of the island. Distinguished visitors found their way thither, as in England they find their way to cathedrals, castles, and great country houses. One such visitor was Signor Nerli, the Italian artist, who painted Stevenson's portrait and was himself made the subject of a set of comic verses.[1] More and more Vailima got a reputation for a generous, even a lavish hospitality. Tusitala, the wonderful, gave splendid feasts that crammed the great redwood hall with the élite of Upolu, feasts which were always ordered with a fastidious regard to lordly ceremonial.

Tales of those banquetings, richly embroidered, appeared in the British and American press; and were read with amazed eagerness by multitudes who almost dreamed they were reading a new chapter of the "Arabian Nights." Henley, eking out life on a meagre civil list pension in an English cottage, read them with the crowd, and had his own thoughts of

[1] The Nerli portrait came into the possession of Mr. James R. Tyrrell of Sydney who sold it to the late Sir Thomas Anderson Stuart for £40. It was recently sold at the Stuart sale in Sydney for £120. It is now in the National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh.

the old days when the magnificent being in Samoa shared his bed, his crust, and his whisky-and-soda. Times were indeed changed. The Shorter Catechist, the writer of beautiful prayers, the novelist of world-wide renown, the Chief among Chiefs, shone gloriously. But where was the crony and comrade of Lothian Street, Ealing, and many another haunt? The indigent scribe had become the bountiful, fabulously grand Lord of the Manor; the atheist who had outraged orthodox Edinburgh was the bosom friend of priests and nuns. "Splendid," roared Henley, "splendid!" and permitted himself a burst of ironical laughter.

In Samoa itself all tongues were not tuned to praise or adoration. Certain of the white population affected to be amused; certain others, more candid or less well bred, tittered, jeered, and whispered. "A bouncing egotist who loves the limelight as a beach comber loves rum," they said. "Kind of drunk over that little bit of land up the mountain-side," said others. All the same he went on unabashed, playing his mimic game as chieftain. Always friendly with the natives, he became in an especial sense their patron. Was there a festival or dance he was present, and his gallantries to native belles were, I am informed, the cause of much chuckling in the stores and saloons of Apia. Imputations were made and denied; and I gladly chronicle one

emphatic denial. "The honour of a native girl," writes Stevenson's friend, the Reverend S. J. Whitmee, "was as dear to Stevenson as the honour of a white woman."[1]

In a mass of petty gossip truth becomes obscured; and Apia in Stevenson's day was notoriously a "poisonous gossip-hole." It spared nobody, least of all its most conspicuous figure, whose free, unconventional ways all too easily made him a target for malice or detraction. In this connection Mr. Charles Whibley, in his brilliant essay on Rabelais, has furnished an unanswerable plea in defence of the man of letters stupidly or maliciously accused of loose living. "It is easy for priests and pedants," writes Mr. Whibley, "from the depths of their armchairs to charge with the grossest vices of debauchery and drunkenness a writer they cannot understand. Yet one thing they forget . . . vice is for the idle, not for the life of invincible energy. . . . It is the story of Harry Fielding over again — of Harry Fielding whom the critics have seen stained with claret and tumbling upstairs drunk to bed *as though the reveller could rise in the morning to the easy composition of a masterpiece.*"[2]

Meanwhile the banished Mataafa was eating his heart out under guards on a distant island. For him

[1] The *Atlantic Monthly*. Volume 131. Number 3.
[2] "Literary Portraits." London. Constable and Company.

Stevenson could do nothing; but many of Mataafa's adherents were in prison in Apia, and towards them he acted with characteristic generosity, often at no small personal risk. For the forces of Malietoa were jealous, vigilant, eager for a chance to be vengeful; and whatever the white officials might feel in their hearts, the ruling powers were pledged to support the puppet they had themselves placed on the throne — with the munificent allowance of some fifty dollars a month to maintain a regal state. Stevenson even feared an attack on Vailima, and again took what precautions for defence were possible with his tiny arsenal and his little band of helpers. But Malietoa and his advisers had too fond a regard for their own skins to endanger them by attacking one who, though he held no official position, was fast becoming the most powerful white man on the island.

## "THE STERN VOICE OF DUTY"

Such things, however, were external, incidental. Stevenson had set one clear ideal before himself — the ideal of work, and to that ideal he clung when wisdom would perhaps have counselled him to relax. In language that has thrilled millions of ardent ambitious young souls, Goethe and Carlyle have extolled the nobility and the virtue of work. So far as I know, the history of literature furnishes no more inspiring example of heroic endeavour than Stevenson

exhibits in the closing period at Vailima — often in the most disabling conditions. In a passage familiar by repeated quotation, he told George Meredith something of the hard, long-sustained fight, how he had "wakened sick and gone to bed weary", and yet did his "day unflinchingly." And he added, "the battle goes on — ill or well is a trifle, so as it goes." The battle went on till the fighter dropped.

It is just there, in that splendid devotion to his task, that Stevenson deserves the title of hero — for nothing but innate heroism could have carried him on in the face of such odds. We need not arch our eyebrows and remark that of course it was his own fault, or that he deliberately chose that descent to the sordid labour of "pot-boiling." Wisely or unwisely, he put his neck into the yoke; and, however the flesh might sink or fail, the spirit was unyielding. As time passed the yoke grew no lighter. His income was large and was steadily increasing; in the last year it reached £5,000. Yet there was neither ease nor rest for the driven brain. For with every increase there came new demands. Luxury creates its own necessities, and Stevenson was their slave. For the artist the position was pitiable; but it glorified the man. And let it always be remembered he toiled for others, not for himself.

As his custom was, he had several things on the anvil, turning from one to another, as interest or in-

clination suggested. His share in "The Ebb Tide" gave him trouble out of all proportion to the result achieved. It will be recalled that the first draft was written at a gallop by Mr. Lloyd Osbourne in Honolulu. Stevenson now undertook to "work it over", and in effect the working-over meant that he wrote the second half *de novo*. With the finished work he was almost savagely dissatisfied. The style was sensationally bad (he dreaded that he was losing his style), being a "mere veil of words", while the characters, as he remarked to Henry James, are "such a troop of swine", a description which his staunchest admirers reluctantly accept as accurate. He greatly desired that the story should appear in the *Illustrated London News*, with illustrations by Gordon Browne. Instead, however, it appeared in a much less artistic form in *To-day*, a short-lived weekly paper edited by Mr. J. K. Jerome, where it ran from October, 1893 to February, 1894. It failed to please the big serial public, while discerning readers found in it ominous signs of degeneration. Why all this violence, they asked, this wallowing in the ugly and horrible? Had Stevenson ceased to be an artist, or did he care no more for wholesome, clean romance? His answer was that he had a family and must live.

Among his other projects in fiction was a Breton love story to be called "The Owl", of which only an introductory page was written; and "Heather

Cat", a tale of Cameronian doings and the disastrous Darien scheme, already mentioned. He also worked occasionally on a long-promised volume of "Fables" and sketched a history for children, in which, however, he found he could not compete with Scott. With far more interest and ardour he continued his history of the Stevenson family, a work which, in my judgment, has never received the appreciation it deserves. There, of course, pride and affection were both closely engaged. The author was writing with his heart as well as his head, and the effect is an enthusiasm which carries the reader triumphantly over incidents and characters by no means intrinsically interesting. The work involved considerable research for which he had mostly to depend on Charles Baxter and other friends in Scotland. His mother, then on another visit to her home, also did much to aid in verifying obscure or difficult questions. One point on which he laboured with immense zeal to the last was his fancied descent from Rob Roy or some other Highland chief. He was still seeking proof when he died.

In September, 1893, feeling, as he said, utterly "worn out", he went off to Honolulu, meaning to make but a brief stay. But a cold caught at the end of the first week developed into pneumonia so severe that his wife had to hasten to his side and nurse him. The visit nevertheless had its pleasant incidents. In

Honolulu there was, and I believe still is, a strong Scots colony — who received Stevenson as a literary and social lion. Before falling ill, he delivered an address at the Thistle Club, which he promised to repeat before a public audience. Excusing his inability to keep the engagement, he remarked humourously that it would be foolish to risk his life for "a two-bob" lecture. He was, however, elected an honorary chieftain of the club, a compliment which greatly gratified him; and was presented with one of the small silver badges worn by members on their coat lapels. He wore it pinned to his breast, and in the end it was buried with him. It was then, too, that Mr. Allen Hutchinson made the bust of him which was exhibited in London at the New Gallery Summer Exhibition in 1895; as well as the cast of his right hand and wrist from which Mrs. St. Hill has given so delicate and interesting a delineation of character.

Early in November he was again at Vailima, recuperated and "redder than a cherry." His birthday, the 13th, was celebrated royally by a feast, held a week late because of an inconvenient little ailment on the right date. Another feast followed at Christmas; and there were gifts, made with much graceful ceremonial eloquence, from grateful chiefs whom he had befriended in jail and who were now at last free. There came to him, too, during that fall what was

probably the most heartening intelligence he had ever received in regard to his position and popularity as a writer — the proposal for the Edinburgh edition of his works. The origin of that enterprise was singular, and for particulars of its inception I am indebted to Mr. W. Macdonald Mackay, of Toronto. During a residence of several years in London, Mr. Mackay knew Charles Baxter intimately. Besides frequent meetings in "the beaten way of friendship", they had a standing agreement to meet once a week in Baxter's rooms, which were, I think, in Chancery Lane. One evening, as Mr. Mackay relates, Baxter and Henley were dining together at a London restaurant, and the talk, as may be supposed, turned on Stevenson. On getting to sleep that night, Baxter "dreamed he saw a shelf of books by Stevenson, like the old Edinburgh edition of Scott; and when he woke he hied himself to Andrew Chatto, told of his dream, and forthwith had a number of dummies made up and settled on, exactly as the Edinburgh edition was issued. It netted the Stevenson estate £6,000, I understand, the result of Baxter's dream." Stevenson professed to believe in dreams; here was a dream that "came true" in the most practical and delightful manner.

Thus the year 1893 drew to a close. The world, as the phrase goes, was flowing upon Stevenson. In the islands his name was one to conjure with, not

figuratively but literally. Natives looked up to him as to a father; he was consulted on all manner of business, public and private; and though he complained that such consultations wasted his time, he liked, and indeed invited, them. They were part and parcel of his chieftainship, and as such to be endured and enjoyed. Vailima became a word of magic in Samoa, and not in Samoa only, but also in the great outer world which interests itself in the doings, the achievements, and the eccentricities of celebrities. People talked of Byron in Greece and Robert Louis Stevenson in his Pacific island as parallel instances of high romance, with just the essential touch of tragic drama. For as Byron seized the public imagination by the glory of his final effort for liberty, so did Stevenson by the strangeness of his destiny and the valour of his behaviour. To thousands and tens of thousands who had never seen his face, save in counterfeit presentment, he became a hero, a prophet, an exemplar in lofty courage and nobility.

### GLORY AND UNHAPPINESS

Materially his success was dazzling. The most ardent, the most optimistic, of partisans in early days could not have foreseen that the laughing-stock of Edinburgh, the "weevil in a biscuit" of Bournemouth, the unspeakable fool who preferred literature before law and engineering, could ever soar to such

fame and fortune as novelist and grandee. He had confuted the sceptics, silenced the prophets of evil, vindicated himself gloriously by realising the wildest of his boyish dreams. It was all a magnificent triumph, won before a fascinated and admiring world!

And yet — and yet he was not happy. Man, it has been well said, carries heaven or hell in his own breast. It might be too much to say that Stevenson carried hell in his breast; but it would be the wildest exaggeration to say he carried heaven. Why was he unhappy? He had fought and conquered brilliantly. What was there to poison the joy, the elation of victory? Was he another illustration of the moralist's text that worldly glory is but a shadow and worldly prosperity but dust and ashes? The moralist, I think, is not at all concerned in the matter. The truth is that in the midst of success Stevenson was haunted, in moments horrified, by a sense of failure. Though cheques came to him in larger and ever larger amounts, he bemoaned declining powers and a declining popularity.

Even the Edinburgh Edition, with all that it implied, failed to assure him. As a matter of fact, the friends who planned and carried through that excellent venture were hurt because he did not appreciate its significance, or its almost certain effect on his fortunes. Nothing could dispel the idea that

he was "a sucked orange", already, in the current slang, a back number. With a sort of jesting earnestness he wrote to Henry James of softening of the brain. The passion for work continued, indeed increased, without the power. The imagination, once so eager and nimble, grew feeble, sluggish, and at last seemed to refuse its office. As we have seen, it was nothing new for him to begin a work, write a few chapters with intense ardour, and then stop suddenly because invention failed. But now, even when he found promising material, he was unable to use it, or if he did, it was in what he called a "left-hand style."

Under this sense of impotence he became depressed and irritable. In general, men of high talent have what is called "a temper." Without it probably they would not be men of high talent. But Stevenson, losing self-control, was more and more prone to break into ungovernable transports of anger. "Nerves," says the discerning reader succinctly. Doubtless; but the cause went deeper than temporary irritation. The whole man, mental, moral, physical, was unstrung. He was as a dreamer who wakes to find all his pleasant dreams false; an idealist rudely stripped of his illusions — at best a painful, and, to a temperament like Stevenson's, a dismal, shattering experience. With that loss came, perhaps inevitably, a yet greater, the loss of the gay, buoyant self-reli-

ance, the self-faith which in so many a crisis had been the sustaining principle of his life.

We touch here on the uncertain region of morbid psychology, in which things are distorted out of all true proportion and perspective. In more than one eloquent passage Stevenson dwelt on the imperative need of faith. It was a tragic irony that his own faith should have failed when his need was the sorest. He knew, none better, that to be without faith is to be impotent; that to lose one's ideals is to lose the wellspring of hope and the mainspring of action. Many things, many mysteries, vexed and troubled him. Questions arose in his soul clamouring for an answer; and he could find none.

> Oh! I would like to ken, to the beggar wife, says I,
> The reason o' the cause an' the wherefore o' the why:
> Wi' mony anither riddle brings the tear into my e'e
> *It's gey an' easy speirin'*, says the beggar wife to me.

In moments of gloom his whole life's work appeared to be summed up in one word — Failure. After all his strivings, what was it? A few essays, a few tales for boys, a losing fight with destiny; and, last satire of all, possessions which were bestowed only to kill. He brooded and grew morose — with flashes of the old gaiety which, like midnight lightning, but emphasised the darkness. He found offence where none was intended. Thus he complained with some asperity that so sterling a friend as Mr. Colvin

was a "little too cockney" with him, and suggested more imagination in critical judgments. Even the well-meant efforts of affection close at hand were often an irritant; and it may be (human judgment being fallible) that such efforts were not always judiciously made.

One delicate point must be mentioned. It was a common remark in Apia — and the remark has been repeated to me on first-hand knowledge — that Stevenson was "far too much under the thumb of his womenfolk", that they ruled and directed his life, that, in fact, he was their puppet, if not their slave. We know the graceful tributes in prose and verse he paid his wife; we also know his appreciation of the services of his step-daughter, Mrs. Strong, as amanuensis when he was disabled by writer's cramp. Possibly their interest was somewhat too exclusive, too exacting. Moreover, it may be that Stevenson, in weakness and weariness, surrendered his freedom and his judgment too easily. It is not suggested that he had any need to take to himself the pungent lines of Burns on "the crouching vassal to the tyrant wife."

But as I have had occasion to remark, Mrs. Stevenson was preëminently a manager. She was efficient and she was ambitious. In any orchestra in which, so to speak, she played, she liked to be first fiddle; and at Vailima she was first fiddle in

all save the power to earn money. Stevenson's interests, which were also her own, she guarded jealously. He must work: and she did her best to protect him from interruptions. Were her care and her authority a little too stringently exercised? It is hard to graduate affection and solicitude with perfect wisdom. Affection may be too assiduous, solicitude too anxious. But one point is beyond doubt, that his wife's incessant care and watchfulness prolonged Stevenson's life and enabled him to work as he did.

But whatever his secret thoughts and feelings might be, whatever the domestic irritations or spurts of rebellious temper, Stevenson resolutely kept a smiling face to the outside world. Life flowed on with all the old brave show of enjoyment. He rode down into Apia on his brown pony Jack, or on a more conspicuous piebald steed bought from the proprietor of a stranded circus, exchanging blithe greetings with all and sundry, white and brown; attended native festivals and fêtes; and even shocked the orthodox by organising a "paper-chase" on Sunday — a lapse which brought trouble with the missionaries. The stream of visitors, too, continued, and among those who were especially welcome were three fellow-novelists, Mr. Sidney R. Lysaght, Mrs. E. H. Strain, and Mr. Lafroni Middleton, who brought a grateful whiff from the active world of literature from which he was shut off. There were travelling journalists

also, whom Stevenson generously supplied with "copy" of a varied and occasionally a comically contradictory kind. Other guests were expected who never came — Charles Baxter, Mr. Rudyard Kipling, Mr. J. M. Barrie, and above all Mr. Sidney Colvin. "You must come, you simply must," he wrote Mr. Colvin again and again. In case Samoa were too remote, there were plans for a meeting in Honolulu, in Ceylon, in Egypt; but the meeting never took place.[1]

Usually callers found him negligently attired and apparently very much at ease in tight-fitting, sleeveless shirt, and trousers rolled up halfway to the knee — with bare feet. While talking, one interviewer reported, "he rested his right foot across his left knee. It was a symmetrical foot, long and slender and beautifully arched; and as he talked he gently toyed among his shapely toes with his disengaged hand." The interviewer added that "his face is gaunt and haggard, with an expression of continual weariness." Alas! his heart as well as his face was haggard.

Throughout the first half of 1894 he was busy with "St. Ives" and "A Family of Engineers", after having twice laid aside "The Chief Justice" ("Weir of Hermiston"). Both the novel and the family history transported him back to Scotland. Once more he

[1] Charles Baxter was actually on his way to Samoa when the telegram announcing Stevenson's death reached him at Aden.

was in Edinburgh, at Swanston, among "the green folds" of the Pentlands, or with officers of the Northern Lights, braving the dangers of the wild western or northern coast. It was like a return to his lost youth and the land and people engraven on his heart. He had in hand also "The Amateur Emigrant", which he undertook to condense or recast for the Edinburgh edition. That edition went forward so prosperously that, after some captious objections due to a lack of understanding, he was delighted with the scheme; and wisely left it to Baxter and Mr. Colvin — surely two of the most devoted friends any author ever had. In June his mother returned from Scotland, and he was gladdened by news of the old home and the people with whom he dwelt so much in imagination.

### THE ROAD OF GRATITUDE

Thus spring passed into summer — our summer — and summer into autumn. In September came one of the most exquisite surprises of his life, when a deputation of chiefs gave him the first hint of the Road of the Loving Heart, of which so much has been written. It was to be "a token of gratitude" from those he had befriended in the day of calamity. Knowing Samoan ways, he imagined it was but a polite, politic device for getting money out of him; in other words, that what he did not pay in wages he

should be expected to bestow in presents. He was most agreeably undeceived. The road, made to connect his house with the public way lower down, was to be an absolutely free gift. In a month it was finished and presented; and Stevenson, as he might well be, was immensely gratified by the "unheard-of compliment." When all was ready, there was a feast of celebration at which donors and recipient made graceful, eloquent speeches which may still be read with interest. At the road itself was a board bearing an inscription in Samoan, of which, I am informed, the following is a fairly literal translation:

"THE ROAD OF GRATITUDE

"Considering the great love of His Excellency Tusitala in his loving care of us in our tribulation in the prison, we have prepared this splendid gift. It shall never be muddy; it shall endure for ever, this road which we have made."

That was early in October. Five weeks later, on the 13th of November, his birthday was celebrated with unusual grandeur and enthusiasm, by a company native and foreign that packed the great redwood hall. Completely in his element, Stevenson seemed to overflow with happiness. Later, on the 29th, American Thanksgiving Day, he entertained his American and other white friends to a dinner in

honour of the occasion. Again he appeared to be in exuberant spirits, was, in fact, as one of the guests afterwards remarked, the soul of the party. In a speech infinitely touching in the retrospect, he made grateful reference to each member of his family individually, beginning with this beautiful tribute: "There on my right sits she who has but lately from my own loved native land again come back to me — she whom, with no lessening of affection of others to whom I cling, I love better than all the world besides — MY MOTHER." Let us note the date well — November 29, 1894 — for it marks his last speech and the last of his many entertainments. Did any one present perceive a shadow over that scene of happiness, gaiety, and good-fellowship? In the old legend the sword of Damocles was suspended over the feast by a single hair, as a warning to those who feasted how uncertain was life and how sudden calamity might come. Had any one who sat festively that night at Stevenson's table any premonition of what was so near? Four days, a little, little span of four days: and then ——

If any one present had any foreboding, it was Stevenson himself, the host, the man who seemed all life and joviality. Was his joviality a mask? Of late, in the stillness of the evening hour, it had become very much his habit to steal off alone and gaze wistfully at the top of Mount Væa; indeed, the

frequency with which he was found in that attitude and the expression on his face troubled his wife, his mother, and other members of the family. What were his thoughts as his eyes rested on that lonely peak? Was he, in the language of his own people, fey? Had he some weird, supernatural intimation of what was so close at hand? or was he, like his own Will o' the Mill, ready to welcome the friend who finally resolves every doubt, cures every ill? He knew he had come to Upolu to die, and had chosen his burial-place. Did he long to lie down and be at rest? I think there can be no doubt he felt the end was near, and I believe he was not sorry. In mind and body he was inexpressibly weary, tired of the battle, and like a spent warrior longing to take off his harness. The first volume of the Edinburgh edition of his works reached him and gave an exquisite thrill of pleasure. It was a sign, a tangible sign, that he was remembered and loved in his own "inclement city" by the people who mattered most: and he was pathetically grateful. It lifted the curtain of gloom for a little: but it did not pluck from the heart the rooted feeling within.

## "LAST SCENE OF ALL"

And yet even then he was displaying yet another contradiction, in a life, one may say, made up of contradictions. In October, about the time when

the chiefs surprised him with their gift of the Road of the Loving Heart, he had thrown aside "St. Ives" in a mood of self-disgust, and for the third time took up "Weir of Hermiston." And then something like a miracle happened. As by magic the jaded mind, the stagnant imagination, not only recovered tone and spring, but developed new and unsuspected powers. It was as if the creative artist gathered all his energies for a last supreme effort and brought into action powers above and beyond himself. "Weir of Hermiston" stands out not merely as its author's masterpiece, but so incomparably his masterpiece that it almost seems the work of another and greater writer. The freedom, the strength, the originality of genuine creation are on every page. Here at last was the real novelist doing his real work, the creator who had put imitations and dilettantism behind him, and was squarely facing the passionate, throbbing, motley world of human nature. Stevenson himself was awed by the ease with which the story came. After his recent difficulties and inabilities, there seemed something uncanny in this new power, this exuberant energy which enabled him to dictate the moving, gripping tale as fast as Mrs. Strong could take it down.

But if he was amazed and even startled, he could not help being delighted. Long before, he had written of the joy of the artist in successful work.

That joy was now his own in fuller measure than ever before. For he knew, with the assurance of a knowledge beyond all doubt, that what he was doing was good, was, for him, super-excellent. This, he said, was to be his masterpiece; and he was right. For six or seven weeks that burst of new creative energy lasted, and "Weir of Hermiston" progressed at a speed not unworthy of Scott himself.

December came with no visible flagging of inspiration or of power. On the last day there was, I have been informed, some small incident which greatly agitated Stevenson. In his excitable condition he was easily agitated; but he did his daily task as usual, dictating to his amanuensis with complete ease and mastery. In the evening, after a successful day's work, he descended from his tiny workroom, and, apparently with a complete recovery of spirits, joined his wife in making a salad. He produced, too, a bottle of a favourite brand of Burgundy, meaning, perhaps, to atone for the morning's impatience or outburst. As he talked, suddenly, like the child of Scripture, he cried out, "My head, my head!" and clutched it with both hands. Turning away quickly, meaning, it is supposed, to go to his bedroom, he staggered upstairs; at the top he fell insensible, and never spoke again. Two doctors, Doctor Robert W. Anderson, R.N., who was with his ship at Apia, and Doctor Funk, a local physician, were quickly with

him, but only to inform the stricken family that he was dying.

He had been carried into the great hall, and laid, first on his grandfather's chair, and then on a sort of bed-stretcher. His wife, distracted by the suddenness of the tragedy, paced the room wringing her hands; his mother knelt quietly by his side, her tears falling upon him. Brave, fond mother! She had seen the beginning of his life; she had watched over him, loved him, helped him through all the vicissitudes of his strange career: and now she was seeing the end. No more trouble for Louis, whatever there might be for her.

From one part of the room his father looked down on him from Sir George Reid's portrait; from another his grandfather's marble bust. He was thus not so far from home, after all. He lay breathing stertorously, his face flushed, his wide, unseeing eyes staring at the ceiling which had been his pride. Two hours he lay thus, while prayers were said over him. Then of a sudden came a long, convulsive breath; then two or three short, gasping breaths; then a long, fluttering sigh, and he was still for ever. *Unarm, Eros! the long day's task is done, and we must sleep.* The date was December 3, 1894, the hour ten minutes past eight in the evening.

Thus suddenly and almost painlessly passed Robert Louis Stevenson. His age was forty-four

years and twenty days. The cause of death was cerebral hæmorrhage, or apoplexy. In a sense it was characteristic that he should die in such a manner. When the brief cablegram announcing his death and its cause reached Britain, many refused to believe the report; indeed, his uncle, Doctor George W. Balfour, actually wrote to the *Scotsman*, stating it was impossible that he should have so died. The medical explanation, I am informed, is that the blood vessels were weakened by early disease; and therefore on sudden pressure, such as comes from great agitation, easily ruptured.

He was dressed and laid on the great hall table, with the flag which he had flown on the *Casco* over him,[1] and throughout the night watchers intoned the Roman Catholic prayers for the dead. Next day he was buried, quick burial being necessary in that climate. First, however, a way had to be cut through the jungle in order to make it possible for the funeral party to reach the top of Mount Væa. The task, it seemed, could not be accomplished in time; but at dawn an army of willing workers, under the direction of Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, began the work, and soon after noon the path was made. At two o'clock a dozen Samoans, chosen for their strength and stature, bore the coffin forth, and the long, hard climb, emblematic, in a sense, of the dead man's life, began.

[1] Now the treasured possession of the Speculative Society, Edinburgh.

By four o'clock all was over, and he lay at rest. As the mourners departed, an old chief, whom Stevenson had many times befriended, turned on the edge of the descent and looked back.

"Tofā, Tusitala," he murmured, his eyes moist. "Tofā, Tusitala. Sleep, Tusitala."

And after life's fitful fever Tusitala sleeps well.

# CHAPTER X

## CONCLUSION

STEVENSON'S mother did not long survive him. Soon after his death she returned to Scotland, and spent the last two years of her life among the scenes of her girlhood and youth, the scenes that he had consecrated. What Stevenson owed to his mother I have tried to show. As she was the first to perceive his uncommon abilities, so, more fondly than any other, she fostered and cherished them. "Oh! there is an enduring tenderness in the love of a mother to her son that transcends all other affections of the heart," wrote Washington Irving in a passage of immortal beauty. "It is neither to be chilled by selfishness, nor daunted by danger, nor weakened by worthlessness, nor stifled by ingratitude."

So it was with Stevenson's mother. When all others were hostile, when even his long-suffering father reached the limit of patience and endurance, she clung to Louis. She saw him disgraced by folly, ostracised in the town of his birth, made a laughing-stock and a by-word among her own people, and her love but enfolded him the more closely. She did not

suspect (as he did not) that many of the qualities which outraged the respectabilities and pieties of the "unco' guid" of Edinburgh were a heritage from her; that the foreign blood, which, to us, accounts for so many of his peculiarities, was a maternal inheritance. Yet had she known, had she been making atonement for such hereditary transmission, her devotion could not have been more tender, more ardent, or more steadfast.

And in those last years she had her reward for everything. She saw his fame established; she saw him, no longer the writer of promise whose boyish productions she had praised and preserved, as with clear prevision of what was to come, but acclaimed as a master of his art, and one of the best-beloved writers in recent literature. Sweeter still, she saw him honoured where once he was ridiculed and contemned. On December 10, 1896, a great meeting was held in the Music Hall, Edinburgh, to inaugurate a movement for a memorial in his native city.[1] Lord Rosebery presided, and the hall was packed, for Edinburgh, a little conscience-stricken, perhaps, was at last beginning to appreciate something of the achievement of its famous son. When Mrs. Stevenson arrived in the midst of a crowd, there was some difficulty in finding room for her. "His mother is with

[1] The result was the replica of the medallion by St. Gaudens which now stands in St. Giles's Church.

us," said Lord Rosebery; and there was an ovation as she was conducted to a place on the platform. What she heard in the next two hours must have been the rarest cordials to her heart. That meeting was the culmination of her joy. Five months later, on May 14, 1897, she died of pneumonia, at Number 8 Randolf Crescent, overlooking the Water of Leith. It is said she breathed her last with Lou's name on her lips.

Mrs. R. L. Stevenson survived her husband by twenty years. She had returned to California; and at Santa Barbara on February 18, 1914, she died as suddenly as Stevenson had died, and, like him, from the bursting of a blood vessel in the brain. Her body was cremated, and a year later the casket containing her ashes was taken to Apia and built into the side of his tomb on Mount Væa.

### STEVENSON'S LATER APPEARANCE

Stevenson's face is familiar from manifold reproductions of portraits, some of them of no great truth to physical detail. Of his general appearance, the best description is that in Henley's famous, much-quoted sonnet:

> "Thin legged, thin chested, slight unspeakably."

In the end the thinness became a pitiable emaciation. A clear-eyed observer who saw him in Samoa

a short time before his death described him as "almost a skeleton and wasted to a mere shadow. He seemed light enough to lift with one finger. A blow would have killed him."[1] In height he was some three inches short of six feet, and for all its disabilities the fragile figure retained a youthful springiness, litheness, and nervous energy strikingly at variance with his wasted, weary look. His hair, flaxen-fair in childhood, deepened in colour to a very dark brown scarcely distinguishable from black, and was worn long, at any rate until residence in the tropics minimised the risk of catching cold. Copious in youth, it became towards the last thin, straggling, and streaked with grey. His eyes too were brown, and for the narrowness of their setting seemed disproportionately wide apart. All accounts agree they were singularly expressive, especially in moments of joy, when they were, as Henley observed, "radiant with vivacity."

His head was by no means massive, nor for such a man was the rounded forehead at all remarkable, either in breadth or height. The mouth was not without a suggestion of sensuality, and in certain aspects had a somewhat unpleasant look. One observer found it suggestive of vindictiveness, surely a misjudgment.[2] Mr. Frederick Greenwood, once

[1] The *Academy*, December, 1896.
[2] Sir Berry Cusack-Smith, for some time British Consul at Apia.

editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, referring to Stevenson's portraits, wrote: "There are many of them, but all of them have the same strange stamp of something more than personal singularity. The face of him in these portraits is the face of a man from another and *not* a superior world. To me it is the most threateningly elfish face I have ever seen in print or paint."[1]

The voice, though not strong, was rich, mellow and resonant on the middle notes, but apt in moments of excitement to rise to a thin piping treble, partly inherent, partly, perhaps, a reminiscence of the high-pitched Edinburgh intonation. In repose or reflection his expression was often unattractive, some even found it repellent; but all observers agree that when Stevenson smiled his whole countenance was transformed and transfigured. For laughter in the deeper sense he appears to have had little real gift. Even when strongly moved to mirth his laugh was a sort of convulsion as though the effort hurt him physically. Indeed, setting aside the effects of ill-health, his physical characteristics corresponded very strikingly to his mental and moral. Lightness, audacity, fiery impetuosity of heart and soul, an eager, ever-ready enthusiasm rather than depth or power, characterised the whole man. At no period of his life had he the repose of quiet strength; without metaphor it may be said that he was for ever effer-

[1] The *Sphere*, December, 7 1901.

vescent; and in that fact, indeed, lies no small part of his charm.

### A BASELESS FEAR

Stevenson died in the fear that his popularity was waning. The fear, as we know, was baseless. Thirty years have passed since his death; and not only has his popularity not waned, it has soared to a height beyond the wildest dreams of his lifetime. How is that popularity to be explained? Is Stevenson the supreme writer who nestles in the universal heart of humanity and plays upon its strings — that is, does he by virtue of sheer genius captivate and enthrall mankind, or is his triumph achieved by lower, but, to the multitude, perhaps more attractive qualities? The answer, if I have written to any purpose, is given in the course of these pages; yet with the record closed and the finished achievement before us, it may be convenient to consider very briefly both the reasons for his continued vogue and his place in the hierarchy of letters.

Setting aside for the moment the question of intrinsic worth, the circumstances of his life, and the uses made of them, unquestionably account for much of the interest attaching to his career. The public likes the picturesque and spectacular, with a touch of "the penny plain and twopence coloured" spirit. Byron will always cast a spell while Wordsworth may

merely excite a yawn. In his own life Stevenson supplied the elements of a picturesqueness often verging on the bizarre, in a measure and a manner unique in his generation. At the beginning I said he not only wrote romance, but lived romance; and the romance he lived was preëminently of the kind to engage the public attention.

Those queer wanderings in the South Seas; those flights from death; those levities and eccentricities of behaviour and appearance; the penury, the hardship, the invincible determination, and then the sudden blaze of splendour as a Pacific island chief, so romantically reported — all these in their varied and cumulative effect were well calculated to fascinate the public imagination. Moreover, his death was most singularly of a piece with his life. The hero, it has been said, should above all make a striking and dramatic exit. Wolfe, Nelson, Lincoln (to take convenient examples) gave the crowning touch of glory to their lives by the manner of their death. Stevenson's exit was the most arresting event in his history, a fitting consummation of a strange, unparalleled career. As he had lived a life of contradiction, so it seemed meet that he should die tragically of an impossible disease, in the very moment of victory. It seemed that Fate, the supreme and final artist, could not have arranged a more startling, more dramatic passing.

## PERSONALITY

There has to be added the fascination of a bubbling and infectious egotism. "Stevenson," wrote Henley out of the fullness of knowledge, "was of his essence what the French call *personnel*. He was, that is, incessantly and passionately interested in Stevenson. He could not be in the same room with a mirror but he must invite its confidences every time he passed it; to him there was nothing obvious in time or eternity, and the smallest of his discoveries, his most trivial apprehensions, were all by way of being revelations, and as revelations must be thrust upon the world; he was never so much in earnest, never so well pleased (this were he happy or wretched), never so irresistible as when he wrote about himself." In personal and social relationships egotism is a cardinal sin against good breeding; in literature of a certain kind it is a celestial virtue, to be encouraged and adored. Stevenson, as we have seen, cultivated the art with a sleepless assiduity throughout his entire career. And he had his reward in the doting fondness of a host of readers who innocently fancied he was laying his heart bare for their delight and edification. There, they said in tones of rapture, was the most beautiful, the most adorable personality in contemporary, or, as some courageous souls averred, in all, literature. Nothing like his frankness, his charm, had

ever been known. *Le plus grand des plaisirs c'est l' abandon de soi-même.* He let himself go; and the effect was pure enchantment to a world of worshippers. It was a triumph that contributed enormously to his popularity.

It follows that this radiant personality shines resplendently in all his works — essays, letters, books of travel, poems, stories. In the essays, letters, travel books, and poems it is, as already remarked, in place; for there it is of the essence of the charm. But they pay him a doubtful compliment who gleefully discover it as the predominant ingredient in his novels and romances. Every creative writer must have personality, else he were no creator. But the greater he is the more successfully will he merge himself in his characters, the more cunningly, that is, will he conceal himself behind his creations. Out of their divine affluence the master spirits of imaginative literature create a whole bustling, throbbing, variegated world of humanity; but of the magicians themselves we catch scarcely a glimpse. What do we know of Homer from the Homeric poems, or of Shakespeare from his plays? What should we learn of Cervantes from "Don Quixote", of Goethe from "Faust", of Scott from "Ivanhoe", of Thackeray from "Esmond?" To be sure, two great creative artists, Hugo and Meredith, allow personality to romp, on the principle, seemingly, that man is

greater than art. He must be, since art is man's creation. Nevertheless, the real triumph of the creative artist lies, not in self-assertion, but in self-suppression, or at any rate in self-surrender and complete absorption in the art he practises. Notwithstanding their superb achievements, Hugo and Meredith stand rather as warnings than exemplars, the exception, if you like, that proves the rule.

While Stevenson's personality is an abiding charm in his miscellaneous writings, it is, so far as it obtrudes itself in his fiction, a blemish, in reality a cloak used, perhaps unconsciously, to cover meagreness of creative power, a limitation sharply emphasised by the frequency with which, so to speak, he throws himself on the screen. "From the mysterious decree which prescribes the vocations of men," says Renan, in a memorable farewell address, "Tourgenief received the noblest gift of all: he was born essentially impersonal. His mind was not that of an individual more or less richly endowed by nature; it was in some measure the mind of a people." Stevenson was not born with the supreme gift of being impersonal; and to say that is, in effect, to exclude him from the first rank of novelists, and perhaps even from a high place in the second. An ebullient, restless personality (and his was both) so attractive in essays, letters, and occasional poems is, in the higher region of creative literature, a positive bar to supreme ex-

cellence. Scott was very nearly impersonal, and his creations have a rare richness and variety; Shakespeare was completely impersonal, and his creations are — human nature itself.

At the time of his death Stevenson was producing work which, even in its fragmentary state, is beyond all question his masterpiece. What it might or would have become, had he been permitted to finish it, must be fairly obvious to any novelist who takes the trouble to think the problem out. What might have followed it, had longer life been granted, is only a fond speculation. Would the heightened and heightening power have lasted; would it have soared still higher? Manifestly Stevenson was reaching after the true creator's ideal of the impersonal. As he proceeds the broad note of human actuality is sounded more and more clearly, and the vaunted personality obtrudes itself less and less. Would he have gone on; would he have forgotten himself entirely in his creations and given us characters quick with the hot blood of humanity and situations breathing the very breath of Destiny? Such, assuredly, is the way of the immortals.

At bottom it is a question of native endowment. Art is great, but only as the handmaid of Nature; and with all his accomplishments, Nature was not lavishly munificent with Stevenson. Concerning his own gifts he was remarkably clear-sighted and com-

mendably honest. He knew just what enabled him to go so far and achieve so much. Again and again he dwelt on the slenderness of his equipment; nor was he honest in any spirit of mock modesty. It was with no sham humility he insisted that he owed everything to his "dire industry"; and that, if he had genius at all, it was simply a genius for hard work. And which is worthier of the crown of laurel, the Titan who does all things easily because of his great strength, or the ordinary man who, in the stress of battle, acquits himself not only honourably but heroically, even in the face of failure?

In one important respect Stevenson was at a grave disadvantage. A writer, be his gifts never so high and splendid, is not a patent machine for producing books, nor is literature a vague and cloudy something, remote from the warmth and throb of life, something anæmic, attenuated, ethereal, never meant to come home to men's business and bosoms. An author is first a human being; and the more human he is the better for the creatures of his imagination. Though Stevenson roamed the world so much, the circumstances of his life precluded him from becoming "deeply versed in the ways of men." It was a serious loss. For the novelist of all men can least afford the sheltered seclusion of cloisters or the sick-room. His business is not with monks or nuns, or the circumscribed activities of the invalid; it is not even, as

Stevenson discovered, with imaginary pirates and highwaymen; but with the seething, motley world of ordinary men and women who jostle and strive and suffer, succeed and fail, love and hate, are happy or miserable. If he is to depict them as they are, transfer them, in all their palpitating reality, to his canvas, he must know them, live with them, enter into their lives — in a word, become as one of themselves.

The superiority in many respects of the great Greek and Roman writers lies, I conceive, largely in the fact that they were also men of affairs — soldiers, admirals, politicians, adventurers in the practical sphere of action. They knew the world before they wrote of it. The same is true of our own Elizabethans; and, indeed, continues to be true of almost every writer of enduring quality. Save for a short time at the end of his career, Stevenson took no part in affairs and was little in contact with men of the world. The experience, when it came, was slight enough. Yet it does not appear at all fanciful to ascribe to it, at least in part, his new feeling for reality, and his sense of its necessity in his own work. Remote as "Weir of Hermiston" is from Samoan scenes and characters, it may easily have benefited by its author's enlarged knowledge of the mixed, anomalous, contradictory motives which actuate mankind. The imagination was enriched and stimulated by new

suggestions; and to the imagination a suggestion is more than a volume of evidence to the dry-as-dust intellect.

### SCOTT AND STEVENSON — THE SECRET OF STYLE

It is the fashion, indeed it has become a commonplace of criticism, to compare Stevenson with Scott. It seems to me unfair, almost cruel, to make such a comparison. Beside Scott, Stevenson is the smart boy in a lower form, pert, alert, nimble, indubitably clever and agile, but lacking thew and sinew. "Sir Walter's books," observes a discerning American critic, "seem to me like a large symphony which has many discords; Stevenson's like a discreet yet moving theme perfectly played on fewer instruments." The perfectly played theme, be it big or little, is always a delight; but it may well be less impressive, less potent to touch and enthrall than the broken music of the large, careless genius whose very imperfections spring from inexhaustible opulence. The lover of verbal neatness, of grace, of symmetry, will always be apt to deride Scott and extol Stevenson.

As has been pointed out a hundred times, Scott is slovenly, uncouth, inchoate. He has passages without number which set the teeth on edge. There is scarcely a fault of style which a teacher of English might not illustrate from his works, while Stevenson is the model to be set with enthusiasm for the class.

At first glance he seems to have all the virtues which Scott so conspicuously lacks. Yet Scott is in the first flight of English prose-writers, and Stevenson is not. The Waverley Novels, disfigured as they are by blemishes which would bring a fourth-form boy deserved punishment, dull, ragged, careless as they are in many parts, nevertheless contain scenes and passages by the hundred (they will readily occur to every reader) which in pure style soar to heights never reached by Stevenson.

The reason is obvious. For style at its highest something more than a delicate, fastidious taste in words is needed. Indeed, it is no paradox to say that not until the creative writer forgets words in the glow, the "fine frenzy" of creation does he achieve the glories, the harmonies, and witcheries of great style. The white-heat intensity of imagination, in which language becomes molten and runs easily into any shape imposed upon it, is the real secret of that final triumph. The "thoughts that breathe" bring the "words that burn." So it ever is with the lords of language. Isaiah, Job, Æschylus, Dante, Shakespeare, are above the dominion of words — masters, not slaves. And often intensity of imagination performs its miracles as with the artless simplicity of a child. *The driving is like the driving of Jehu, the son of Nimshi, for he driveth furiously.* There at a stroke, as by a flash of lightning, we have

a whole character limned. By a single sentence composed of simple words Jehu and his driving are made vivid for ever.

Of that miraculous power Stevenson had little. With him language is rarely if ever molten; rarely if ever comes with a pouring rush that, so to speak, carries the reader off his feet. Rather his style flows equably like a smooth, pellucid, sunlit stream, with a murmur very soothing, very sweet to the ear, but conveying little suggestion of velocity, and none at all of the beauties and terrors of the cataract and the abyss. "The thought constructs the tune," said Emerson of Shakespeare; and at his best the same is true of Scott. With Stevenson, almost to the very end, the tune constructs the thought. The difference is immense, vital; and it is essentially the difference between the author of "The Antiquary" and the author of "Kidnapped."

The enormous labour it cost Stevenson to master the art of writing has been fully described in the preceding pages; here it is necessary only to touch very briefly on the result. Such was his zeal for mere technique, it might be said of him, as was said of Amiel, "he would willingly believe that writing is a thing apart from thinking." He doted on words, not like a student but like a lover; wore them, as he remarked, "next his skin and slept with them." And he succeeded in fashioning for himself an instru-

ment of rare and exquisite delicacy. It is not an instrument of any remarkable compass or power; the heights and depths of passion and emotion are beyond its range, or more correctly beyond the range of its creator; for, after all, in essence the style is the man. No theory of æsthetics or of technique, no piously-devised system of "learning to write", will produce a Shakespeare. A Shakespeare simply arrives; and behold! unimaginable splendours and glories of style. In that matter as in so much else Nature keeps her mystery inviolate.

Nevertheless, the genius which is "an infinite capacity for taking pains" achieves wonders; and, by dint of incredible labour and a devotion almost unexampled, Stevenson achieved a style which, probably more than any other of his time, has moved admiration and envy. Never before was style so loudly and so lavishly praised. I have refreshed my memory by rereading a selection of the innumerable panegyrics it has evoked, and have enjoyed a feast of superlatives. It is indeed difficult to see by what stretch of ingenuity adulation could be carried farther. All the excellences, all the beauties, all the virtues which have ever distinguished the masterpieces of literature are, so the eulogists boldly aver, exemplified and enhanced in the writings of Stevenson. It is good to be generous, and such burning enthusiasm is immensely exhilarating, even if it

momentarily dazzles and bewilders the critical judgment.

It should be noted that much of that unqualified praise was bestowed while Stevenson still lived, and that he was not intoxicated. The peril of excessive praise is a favourite theme with the moralist. We are told that it relaxes the fibre, swells the head, induces a spirit of carelessness, of pride and insolence. The exact contrary was the effect on Stevenson. To him eulogy was not an intoxicant but an incentive, spurring him to yet higher ideals and more arduous efforts. As his reputation grew he became more and more exacting with himself, more and more a believer in the virtue of constant, determined work. Public appreciation was but the measure of his failure. For he knew (as every true artist knows) how pitiably his best efforts fell short of his own ideal. That shone high above him like a star, mentor and monitor, at once taunting him with weakness and inspiring him with hope, and he followed it with all the concentrated ardour of a devotee.

### THE CROWNING MERIT

And it is precisely there that he makes his last, most potent appeal. Men and women in general are little concerned with questions of style; even in books "which the world will not willingly let die" they may have but a feeble and transient interest.

But they are fascinated by devotion, thrilled and inspired by the spectacle of the brave man fighting against disastrous odds. I have tried to show how Stevenson lived, fared, and did his work, in what disabling conditions, with what tragic interruptions. We have followed him from land to land, from sea to sea, in his flight from "swift death." We have seen him blind, prostrate, deep in the Valley of the Shadow, given up by doctors, and still toiling invincibly. In his own sphere, what other man than he has achieved so much amid so many difficulties and obstacles? Alike in quantity and in quality the work he accomplished is amazing; and, all things considered, is, so far as I know, without parallel. In the whole history of English literature there does not shine a braver, more devoted spirit than Robert Louis Stevenson.

As he comported himself in his strange passage through the world he was not always wise (who is?), and I have not concealed his follies. He was human, and therefore fallible; in certain clear-shining virtues which outweigh many faults he was (as I like to think) human also; and these too I have endeavoured to set forth as they were. I have said that he can bear the truth; and on that principle this book is written. From some vices, by no means uncommon, he was notably free. There was in him nothing of the cad, nothing of the snob; his whole

career was, in fact, a protest against snobbery, from which in his early days he was forced to endure much.

His intimate friendships were few; in that respect he was callous enough to be self-sufficing; yet I do not find that he ever failed a friend in the hour of need. If his honour was at times smirched, it was nevertheless a principle of his nature to abhor meanness, chicanery, and all that goes with these. Above all, there shines in him an unflinching fidelity, a consuming devotion to an ideal. Of the shirker, the coward, there was not an atom in his composition. In the end his faith was the faith of the man who strives to the last iota of his strength. He died working, died, as he wished to die, "in his boots", a soldier gallantly fallen on the field of battle. It is in fidelity, in courage, that he is especially illustrious. He is of the heroes —

> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will,
> To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.

I end, therefore, as I began. When Robert Louis Stevenson is summed up, when his qualities, mental and moral, have been analysed and tabulated, it will be found that a superb courage crowns all. And from that master-quality flows, almost as a matter of course, other virtues in which he was conspicuous — chivalry, generosity, love of justice, an eager humanity, a passion for the happiness of the

race. Criticism may deny him the title "great"; it cannot deny that he was brave. And it is his valour, tried as by fire at many a turn, more than aught else that enchants, inspires, and endears him to the peoples of two hemispheres. At parting I salute him where he reposes on his lonely hill-top in the far Pacific:

Atque in perpetuum, frater ave atque vale.
Brother, hail and farewell, a long, long farewell.

END OF VOLUME TWO

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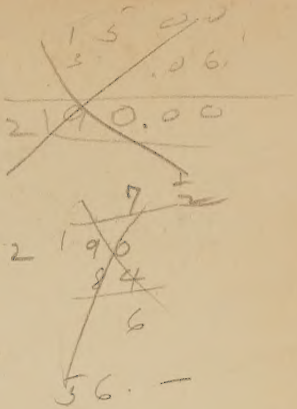

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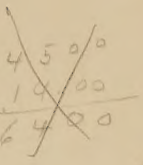

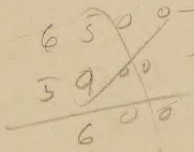

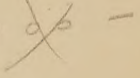

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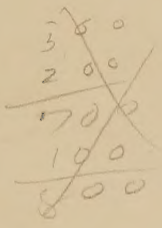

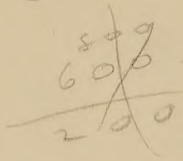

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